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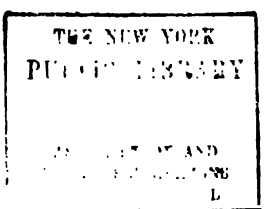
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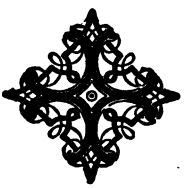
He felt his fingers relax and strove to tighten them, a sharp, stinging pain through his side.

The Mediator

By ROY NORTON

Author of "The Plunderer," etc.



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By DOUGLAS DUER

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Published July

To My Brother

DEAN S. NORTON

known to many who love him in our far western country as "Dick," getting old and gray, but still dwelling in the heart of things.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Introducing a Peaceful Man	9
II	A Disciple of Bunyan	26
III	Off On The Quest	43
IV	And Peace Cometh Not	60
V	Where The Roof Is The Sky	77
VI	Stirring Up The Peaceful Prospector	88
VII	The Red Haired Girl to The Rescue	106
VIII	Keeping The Peace With a Double-Action Gun	125
IX	At Canada Hill Mine	143
X	Whose Claim?	161
XI	The Trouble-Making Burro	182
XII	The Prospector Proposes	195
XIII	More Trouble For The Love of Peace	210
XIV	On Keeping a Close Mouth	226
XV	"Pardners"	244
XVI	The First Pan of Gold	272
XVII	After The Fight	295

THE MEDIATOR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING A PEACEFUL MAN

"Wo-o-o-ee! Oo-w-w!"

The maudlin, fighting shout of a man enthused by copious drinks of a beverage much stronger than water, echoed down the long, straggling street of Burton, and seemed to rend, as if by force, the very heat waves that rippled the afternoon air. The ponies tied at the hitching racks in front of the weather-beaten, paintless buildings, or standing in the grateful shadows cast by some of them, lifted their heads as if stupidly, or timorously expectant, and there was another interval of silence, the silence of somnolence that always invaded the Arizona border town at this hour of the day. The rolling hills, yellow and bare, that arose from the level back of the town with the abruptness of surprised giants lifting themselves from the broad waste, caught, faintly, the echo of the shout, and scornfully cast it back, as if loath to accept anything

from the camp, which, parasitic, clung to their domain. A store-keeper, who had been peacefully snoring in a tilted chair under a rusty awning in front of his place, suddenly brought the chair upright with a thump as its wooden legs struck the flooring, and then, as if by force of habit, jumped to his feet and slid rapidly inside, to blink sleepily, but cautiously, around the door casing. A man of the type called "greaser," who had been taking his *siesta* in the shade of the "Emporium," sat up with a jerk, said "*Por los huevos del Perro!*" and scrambled to his feet, to slink hastily to the rear of the building that had offered him shelter; and he, also, peeped cautiously around the corner of the structure, and exhibited all the symptoms of well-defined fear.

In the Old Rest Saloon, there was a lifting of heads, a cessation of conversation, and in some individual cases a marked tendency to see whether the rear door was open for emergencies. But one man, short, very broad across the shoulders, and balanced on a pair of legs that seemed absurdly small for the weight of the torso they must support, paid not the slightest attention; for at the moment he was discoursing with two strangers as to the relative merits of burros.

"Now this Jack of mine's sociable! He's

done everything but tell me that he loves me one minute, and kicked the devil out of me the next. He's a rhinosticuter and a —"

The discourse of Elisha Henley was interrupted by another shout from the dusty street marking the progress of the man who yelled, and one of the strange prospectors, manifestly wary, caught him by the arm.

"What for is all that noise out there?" he demanded. "I observes that some of these folks in here is acceptin' it as a warnin' and duckin' out for the sage brush."

"That?" responded Henley with a cheerful smile. "That's nothin' but Bill Higgins out for a little enjoyment."

"And — say — what's his way of takin' it?" rather nervously inquired the second stranger in Burton.

"Straight," gravely observed Mr. Henley. "That is, Bill's all right, except that he's some peculiar. Now, there's days when Bill don't do nothin' more than insist on fightin' the temp'rance unions by makin' everyone take a drink. Then, there's other days when he's sort of argumentative, and it's right easy to pick a fight outen him. Then, there's other times when he just naturally gets a skinful, and goes to sleep under

a pool-table, as happy and as harmless as a little mountain lion with a rattlesnake for a piller; but, say, don't think I'm agin Bill, because I ain't. When he's sober, he's the whitest, finest man that ever walked, Bill is. Drunk, I don't care much for him; but sober, I'm for him. Ain't no decenter man in Arizona, sober, than Bill Higgins. Drunk, they ain't nobody so dog-gone rantankerous."

Somewhat pacified by the remarks of Mr. Henley, the strangers in Burton continued their quest for information as to the characteristics of the range behind the camp and the mineral formations, unaware that the, "Weo-o-o-w!" out in the street was steadily advancing in their direction, and that many of the gentlemen in the Old Rest were furtively departing. The man who had been drowsing at the faro bank gathered the bank-roll into his pockets, and slipped the checks into a box at his feet. The man who had been oiling the roulette wheel quickly put away the can, pulled a rubber cloth over the lay-out, and walked thoughtfully toward the rear door with an occasional backward glance at the front one, as if desirous of anticipating the arrival of Mr. Higgins.

"Eats bacon rinds, Jack does," resumed Hen-

ley. "Once he ate the corner off a feller's pack to get at a side of bacon inside, and I'll swan that man was the most unreasonable! Wanted me to pay for the pack tarpaulin. I didn't think it was right for him to ask me to pay for the appetite of a poor little feller like Jack. Also, I didn't have any money. It sure took a lot of argifyin' to get that straightened out without a row. I'm a man of peace, I am! Why, say, they call me the Mediator. It means the feller that always tries to keep folks from fightin'. I know, because a friend of mine, what has a library, looked it up in his dictionary, and told me. He's got pretty near twenty books, that man has! What do you think of that? Great to be eddicated! The Mediator! That's me. Always for peace. They got to run me into a corner and stick pins in me, to get me to say anything back. I always remembers what my mother used to say."

The strangers, trying to reciprocate this peaceful spirit, looked blear-eyed sympathy at Mr. Henley, as he paused to drink the contents of the glass that, thick and opalescent, stood at his elbow, to smack his lips and to wipe his straggling mustache.

"What did she say?" demanded one of them.

"What did she say?" Henley repeated. "Why, she says this: 'Lish, don't you go to fightin' as long as they's a chance to run. Just burn the trail with them feet of your'n rather than have trouble. Light out! Run fast and far. Never stop runnin' till you're plumb out of wind. Then you'll live a long, long time, and, besides, exercise'll be good for you, because you're so damn lazy that I reckon you never will move fast unless it's to get out of trouble.' That's what maw said to me."

He looked at his new friends for approval, and they tried to appear impressed. They did not observe that the owner of the Old Rest turned and grinned at himself in the cracked bar mirror with a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"But you don't look to me like you was much of a foot-racer," insisted one of the strangers. "Them legs of your'n ain't exactly shaped like a deer's, you know," and he scanned the ridiculously slender, lithe legs of Mr. Henley, and let his eyes wander upward over the barrel-like body that poised above them.

"It ain't how legs looks, it's how they does," crisply retorted Henley. "A pair of wooden legs that keeps goin' the straight road, and don't tote you into trouble, is a heap better than them

kind that looks like statues, and always takes you to places where you don't belong. Why? Got anything agin them legs of mine?"

The strangers hastened to assure him they had not, and the man behind the bar, who had sharply turned as if apprehensive, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Because if you have," persisted Mr. Henley, "I'd sure take 'em away from here, instanter. Ain't nobody in the world like me for keepin' the peace. That's why they calls me the Mediator. Always out for peace."

He stopped and fixed his eyes on his hearers in a long, impressive pause.

"I reckon," he continued, "that I've done more to keep the peace of this community than any other man in it. And it's an awful place! What with all the fightin' and shootin', and mean folks just achin' to kick up a fuss, I don't know what on earth they'd have done without me here."

A shadow darkened the doorway of the Old Rest and its effect was remarkable; for the proprietor of the place suddenly crouched a little lower behind the long wooden bar, prepared to fall to the floor if necessary, and a wild light of inquiry was in his eyes as plainly as possible for

any look to be. The strangers, catching his expression, turned toward the door, frowning, and the Mediator languidly turned until his back was against the bar.

"We-o-o-ow!"

The author of the shadow, stepped up until he blocked the entire entrance, and quite formidable he looked, standing there with his six feet of height and a breadth of shoulder that would have caused a prize-fighter to take respectful notice.

"Why, hello, Bill," greeted the peaceful Mr. Henley, grinning good-naturedly. "Thought I heard you comin'."

For an instant, with ugly, drunken gravity, Higgins stood in the doorway, and then let out another of his loud whoops.

"Thought you heard me, eh?" he demanded, walking toward the Mediator, who stood in the same indolent, relaxed posture. "Say, you little shrimp, what do you mean by that? Ain't lookin' for nothin', are you?"

"Why, no, Bill; not as I knows of," calmly replied the Mediator. "You know me. I'm always for peace."

There was something approaching a pathetic appeal in his eyes, as he stared back at Higgins,

which caused the latter to relent somewhat from his attitude, in the momentary shifting of an alcoholic mind. His eyes seemed for the first time to fall on the strangers.

"Hello!" he said. "Where'd you come from?"

"California," one of them replied. "Thought we'd see what could be found in the ground over here."

"What's your name?" demanded Higgins, ignoring the etiquette of the camp, which made it a flagrant question when applied to strangers.

"Skaggs," was the prompt reply.

Higgins burst into a loud, insulting laugh.

"Skaggs! Hoh-hoh-ho! Skaggs! Must name my next dog that."

Another phase of his drunkenness caught him, the ugly one, and he proceeded to repeat his war cry, at the top of his voice, while the saloon-keeper edged fearfully toward the farther end of the bar, certain that within a moment there would come some other manifestation of the fighting spirit.

"Well, Skaggs, I don't like your looks!" Higgins roared, as he scowled at the surprised prospector. "An' I want drink. Lots of it! An' I want to drink alone. So, you just take that old

mule of a partner of your'n and pull your freight. Git!"

The prospector's jaw set, and it appeared that he was not the type of man who goes so readily at command; but behind Higgins' back the Mediator skipped nimbly to one side, and held up his hand in a warning gesture, and motioned frantically with his head, beseeching Skaggs to depart quietly, and avoid combat. His appeal was so well meant, and so sincere, that Skaggs finally said:

"Humph! All right. We'll go. No use in huntin' trouble!"

"That's right," seconded the Mediator, a fine enthusiasm in his voice. "That's right. See you later."

The prospectors, without another look at Bill Higgins, tramped out into the street, where they hesitated for an instant, evidently expecting the Mediator to accompany them. But Henley, before their shadows had passed from the sun-scorched patch of sand in front of the door, had nonchalantly leaned against the wall of the room near a corner, and proceeded to roll himself a cigarette with the absent-minded air of a man who pondered over life as a mildly interesting study.

Higgins appeared to have forgotten his presence, or to have ignored him, for he poured himself out an extremely liberal drink of the fighting whiskey for which the Old Rest was famous — or infamous — and gulped it down. He did not offer to pay for it, a fact that did not in the least appear to interest the saloon-keeper who knew, from past experience, that Higgins, drunk, might forget, but that Higgins, sober, would come around to pay for all damage.

Higgins leaned on the bar and stared at the bottle in his hand for a few moments, then decided to take another drink, and the saloon-keeper grew hopeful that he would remain there, and absorb enough to stupefy him, thus insuring the peace of the camp. But he was to be disappointed, for Elisha Henley, the Mediator, struck a match to light his cigarette, and thereby drew the baleful glare of Mr. Higgins.

" Oh, you're still here, are you? " he demanded of Henley. " Well, you just toddle up here and take a drink, now that your sheep-herdin' friends have gone. Step up, I say."

The Mediator grinned pleasantly, walked to the bar, called for a " Sody-pop," and proceeded with due courtesy to wish Higgins, " Right good health." After that, he put the empty glass on

the bar, and looked quite thoughtfully at the roysterer, as if speculating over the man's capacity.

"No, Tim," he said, shaking his head sadly at the man behind the bar, "he ain't anywhere nigh off his feet yet. He's just gettin' started."

"What do you mean by that?" savagely demanded Higgins, turning toward the Mediator.

"Why," was the response, "I just meant that we all had been wishin' you'd get your hide so full that you'd go behind a lumber pile somewhere, and sleep it off. For the good of this here community, you understand, and not meanin' any offense, Bill."

He smiled blithely up at the big man, whose face expressed a rising anger, and then, as he slipped back a few feet from the bar, went on.

"You know, Bill Higgins, we sort of like you when you're sober; but we're always studyin' whether it wouldn't be best to kill you when you're loaded."

Higgins face grew black with temper, but the Mediator seemed not in the least to regard it as a danger sign.

"You're a plumb bad man, Bill Higgins, when you're drunk. You're a heap too handy with your gun and your tongue! Now, you had no

business sendin' my friends out of here when you came in, and I didn't like it. Really," he added, thoughtfully, "I just don't quite know yet why I didn't up and plug you then."

Higgins vented a roar that could have been heard half-way over the camp, jumped backward, and with rare quickness his hand reached for the big gun that was strapped down on his hip. But before the hand had more than touched the butt, the Mediator had acted. Both of his hands seemed to cross themselves just above his hips. One hand flashed a gun, the other hand slapped swiftly backward, there was a report, and Higgins spun half-way round with a bewildered look on his face.

"Fan-triggered him! By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed the saloon-keeper, as he dropped nimbly behind the bar and laid himself flat on the floor.

And, even as he sought this posture of security the Mediator's hand again struck the hammer of his gun, there was a second report, and Mr. Higgins, struggling desperately to keep his feet, lurched and fell on the floor. His gun flew out of his hand and rattled across the room, his hat rolled quietly over on the floor, and his legs stretched themselves into a relaxed attitude. There was

an instant's silence, in which the Mediator, still crouched as if to spring forward or sidewise on his agile legs, peered at the fallen gun man to make certain that the one-sided battle was over, and then he slipped his gun back into the arm holster that had concealed it, and drew a sigh of relief.

"Now ain't that just too bad!" he drawled, in much the same tone that he would have used had a cork broken off in the neck of a bottle. "It's awful foolish for a feller to start out to be a bad man when he ain't no quicker than Bill Higgins. I really felt ashamed for him, I did!"

The saloon-keeper got up and peered carefully over the edge of the bar, prepared to duck down like a jack-in-the-box in case the shooting was not over with, and met the Mediator's smiling eyes.

"Sure, it's all right now," encouraged the latter. "You can stay up, Tim."

The saloon-keeper grinned sheepishly, and started around the end of the bar, just as two or three heads were poked curiously into the doorway, and then, in less than a minute, the Old Rest was crowded with men who came running from all directions. They lifted Higgins up to a sitting posture, and a camp doctor began strip-

ping away his blue woolen shirt, while Elisha Henley, calm and exhibiting nothing more than a lively sense of curiosity, stood by and watched.

"I reckon," he volunteered, cheerfully, "that unless I've forgotten how to shoot, you'll find both shoulders smashed, Doc. That's what I aimed to do, because I didn't want to sure enough kill Bill. You see, I'm sort of fond of him, when he's sober."

The doctor did not answer, and the strange silence continued in the room, as men bent forward awaiting the verdict.

"That's exactly what you did," said the surgeon, after a further examination. "One shot low enough down, though, to be pretty dangerous."

"Pshaw!" said the Mediator, in a regretful voice. "I guess I'm gettin' clumsy with my shootin' iron. Now, ain't that just my luck!"

"Don't crowd too close, please," besought the doctor of those nearest. "Give us air and room."

The crowd moved backward a trifle; but the Mediator still stood in the open space, and now proceeded to roll himself a fresh cigarette with fingers so steady that not a flake of the brown tobacco was wasted. He licked the paper to ad-

hesiveness, struck a match, took a long, grateful puff, then said:

"Doc, ain't it fine that the sisters got the new hospital open this week? Why, say! Bill'll be the first man in it. He ought to be right proud of that. We'll just tote him up there, and I'll pay the bill for him. I'd sure like to have Bill Higgins well taken care of, because, as I said, I'm rather fond of him, when he's sober."

The doctor looked up with a professionally grave face.

"What did you shoot him for, then?" he demanded.

"So's to make him keep the peace," blandly replied the Mediator.

"Well, if that's what you wanted, you should be pretty well satisfied," grumbled the doctor; "for he's apt to keep it for a mighty long time."

He beckoned to some of the men nearest.

"Get a shutter," he ordered, tersely, "and lend a hand here. One of you hustle up to the new hospital, and tell the sisters we're coming."

The big wooden shutter was brought from a near-by store in less than a minute, the big body of Bill Higgins was lifted to it, and a little procession filed away up the street. Behind it walked the Mediator, admonishing the carriers to

walk easily because he didn't want Mr. Higgins hurt any more than was necessary.

And back in the Old Rest business flourished as if nothing tragic or unusual had happened, save for the discussion of the event, and even that was not prolonged, for there was a general atmosphere of thankfulness that Higgins, out on one of his dangerous benders, had been so satisfactorily put away.

"Sort of curious, ain't it?" said the saloonkeeper, as he served a fresh round of drinks to the thirsty ones in front of the bar; "but it's just three months to-day, at the very same hour, since Lish Henley killed that bad man that come across the border huntin' his scalp. Bill Higgins orter have known better than to tackle that rantankerous, pestiferous little cyclone!"

CHAPTER II

A DISCIPLE OF BUNYAN

"IT beareth the name of Vanity Fair, because the town where 'tis kept is lighter than vanity."

The voice of the Mediator had drawled painfully along, pausing now and then to spell out a word; but now it came to a stop, and the book was laid to one side. A black-robed Sister of Charity, walking noiselessly in her felt slippers, suppressed a smile as she paused by the door of the ward, and then stole noiselessly away. The buzzing of flies outside a window-screen which barred them from the room sounded loud and desperate. Bill Higgins, on the hospital bed, moved his shoulders into another position to ease them, and yawned.

"Lish," he said, "that's probably a mighty fine book from the looks of it outside, but it's sure some tedious hearin' you read it."

A shocked, hurt expression depicted itself on the Mediator's face, and he twisted in his chair.

"Why, Bill," he declared, aggrieved, "that there book is Bun-yan's 'Pilgrum's Progress,' and I reckon it's the best book that was ever written."

"'Tain't nothin' like as good as this here feller, Eugene Manlove Rhodes' stories," stoutly asserted Higgins. "Them's stories what I can *sabe*. But this here Bun-yan's a bum! I'm plumb sick and tired of layin' here and havin' you come up every afternoon and drag along with that stuff. Sometimes I sleeps, then it hain't so bad; but when I has to stay awake, because I've slept so all-fired much already, it gets me so sore that I'd give most anything to be able to get up and take a shot at you! There you are! I've had this b'ilin' in my system for two weeks now, and kept quiet because I hoped some time you'd get to the end of it; but you can't, Lish! You can't! It'd take ten years — the way you reads."

He stopped and twisted his head to look at the Mediator, and saw that the latter was wounded to the quick. He surmised that he should make amends for such thoughtlessness, and cleared his throat.

"Don't you mind what I say, Lish," he implored. "I'm an old hog, I am! You told me when you came up, after you'd put me here, that you'd sent to El Paso to get this book because it

was your maw's favorite works. You done your best; but you see I don't understand it. I'm doin' a heap of thinkin'."

The Mediator brightened, visibly, and was mollified.

"I don't understand much of it myself," he admitted, ready to meet anyone half-way. "But you see, Bill, I thought you needed somethin' like this, so I got it. It's a peaceful sort of story, and if there's any one thing I like it's bein' peaceful. I'd —"

He was interrupted by one of the sisters, who came quietly into the room, and said,

"Mr. Henley, the dépôt agent says there's a package down there, marked perishable, that's addressed to you."

With signs of profound agitation, bravely restrained, he got to his feet, and thanked her.

"I'll go right down, Miss, or Missus, or — say — what do they call you, anyhow?" he demanded, facing the issue.

"Sister Ruth," she answered, smiling at his evident embarrassment.

"I sure am much obligated," he said, attempting to be highly courteous, and starting toward the door. "I'd like to come back and see my friend Bill, a little later, if you'll let me."

"Certainly you can, Mr. Henley," she replied, and then, as she leaned over to adjust Higgins' pillow, he disappeared. Outside the little corrugated iron and wooden hut that was dignified by the name of "hospital," he chuckled joyously and mysteriously, and hastened away over the hot road as fast as his legs could carry him, with his worn, dented hat drawn low to shield his eyes from the afternoon glare, and his sun-burned hands swinging vigorously in time with the muscular arms.

He came to the station that squatted, red, scorched, and small, like a dwarf under a huge, broad-rimmed hat, a half-mile from the town, and glanced contemptuously at the "greasers" sleeping on the two trucks in the shade. He paused long enough to inspect a hairless dog nosing around the foot of the water-tank beside the station, and to pity it, and caress it to friendliness.

"I'm in a right smart hurry, Fido," he confided, "but I guess I'll take time to get you a drink. It's hell to go dry!"

The dog, as if sensing his meaning from the kindly gray eyes, followed at his heels as he led the way into the waiting-room, and to a water-cooler, brightly painted, in the corner. The dog

sat expectantly looking upward as the water gurgled into the tin cup, and cocked an apprehensive ear as Lish vented an ejaculation.

"Hang it all! That cup's chained there tight! I'd orter bust it off. That's what I'd orter do; but I can't get at it."

He stopped for a moment in perplexity, then emptied the cup, twisted the chain round his hands, and tensed his shoulders. The big muscles beneath his flannel shirt appeared to leap at his command, his face grew red with exertion, and his hands hardened. The chain did not give.

"Humph!" he muttered. "I'll get you yet!"

He took the bandanna from about his throat, and wrapped it around one hand, appeared puzzled for a moment, then took the tail of his shirt from his trousers, and wound it protectingly around the other hand. With this shield, he again grasped the chain, planted his feet as if to throw every ounce of strength to his task, and again the big muscles bulged. Now, he twisted his hands backward and forward. A link of the chain slowly extended itself, another responded and gave to the strain, and then, answering the heavy, powerful, twisting pull, a link parted and the cup was free.

"There! Dog-gone 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Henley. "We'll learn 'em not to chain things up in a white man's country!"

But there was nothing of exultation over his marvelous strength in his words; merely satisfaction at having overcome an obstacle. He filled the tin cup with the ice-water, sampled it himself with much approval, then refilled the cup and put it on the floor in front of the dog, which fell to lapping it with every sign of gratitude, while the giver stood above him and smiled with an immense understanding.

"Right good and coolin', ain't it, Fido?" the Mediator asked.

There was the sound of a man's feet, and the station agent, new to the camp, came into the waiting-room, wiping the sweat from his forehead, and evidently in quest of a drink. He paused in amazement when he saw the cup on the floor, the dog, and the gratified Mediator, then scowled and swore.

"Who did that?" he demanded, pointing at the broken chain.

"I sort of think it must have been me," admitted Lish, with a broad grin.

The station agent made a dash at the dog, which, loath to leave this marvelous beverage, switched

to the other side of the cup and lapped more greedily. The station agent lifted a foot as if to kick the offending thirsty one, but that was as far as he got, for the Mediator, with a quick reach, caught the station agent by the leg, upset him as if he were a child, and then smiled cheerfully at the over-toppled man. The dog jumped back, affrighted by the scuffle, but was speedily reassured.

"That's all right, Fido," said Mr. Henley, in a reassuring voice. "You just go ahead and finish. You're drinkin' with me, this round, and we don't calculate to let anybody butt in on us, either."

The station agent, overawed by the surprising strength of this strange, smiling man who had so deftly upset him, sat up, and glowered at the Mediator.

"Hope I didn't hurt you, boss," Henley remarked, solicitously. "I'd sure hate to do that, but I reckon I'd of most snuffed you out if you'd landed on my friend here. You ought to know better'n to keep anything from drinkin' out here in a country like this! Water's the first thing anybody ought to have for nothin'. Lordy, Man! you act as if you'd never been thirsty yourself. Why, say, I'd give a rattlesnake water

if I met him on the desert. 'Tain't fair to hog water."

The station agent, having a sense of humor, suddenly laughed and scrambled to his feet.

"Don't know but what you're right about that," he said. "I'll be hanged if I don't put a trough out there under the tank!"

Henley's hand was thrust forward with an abrupt appeal of fellowship.

"By Crackey!" he declared. "You're a feller after my own likin'! I'm right sorry I didn't know you a long time ago."

"But I don't like to have dogs drinking out of the cup here," insisted the agent.

"Pshaw! I don't either," assented the Mediator. "Only, this was a sort of rush case, and I didn't have no time to think. Say! I'll buy a new cup and chain when you get the trough! Eh? That fair enough?"

The agent thought it was. The dog, duly thankful, slipped hastily out into the shade of the station, and Lish made known his want. He departed from the station on terms of amity with the agent, carrying a huge box under his arm, and again turned toward the hospital on the hill back of the camp, where he was admitted by the sister, and conducted inside.

"Hello, Bill," he said, to the man on the cot. "Got a surprise for you."

Higgins looked doubtful until he saw the package, as if fearful that the Mediator had returned monotonously to drone through more weary pages of Bun-yan; but doubt gave way to curiosity as Lish unfolded his box, carefully picking the knots loose with gnarled fingers, and rolling the twine into a little coil before going farther.

"I always save string," he explained. "Never can tell when it'll come in handy. Ain't nothin'll take its place when you want it — not even wire."

He removed the lid from the box, and, to the astonishment of the nurse and the patient, extracted from a damp moss packing a large bouquet of flowers, which he held triumphantly up for approval.

"How's them for posies?" he demanded in high elation. "Nothin' like flowers when a feller's sick. Sent clear over to Phœnix for them, I did. Says I, 'There's old Bill Higgins, white when he's sober, and a cuss when he's drunk, up in the hospital. Flowers for Bill. Make him happy if he's gettin' well, and look good on his coffin if he kicks the bucket!'"

The sister suppressed a smile, and Lish triumphantly displayed his gift, while Bill Higgins

stared at him, then smelled the fragrance, and looked perturbed as if thinking of something.

"Lish," he said, huskily, after the sister had departed, "I want to tell you somethin'. Them posies makes me feel about as o'nery as anything in the world could. It's about my wife — Marthy! She sure loved flowers, and she was the finest woman that ever walked in shoe leather, bar none!"

He set his jaw, and turned his head away, as if ashamed to display any weakness, while the Mediator's mouth opened in astonishment.

"Didn't ever know you had a woman," he commiserated. "Croaked?"

"No! Just left me because I was so damn o'nery and no account!" replied Higgins, still looking away.

"Booze?" asked the Mediator, with a show of interest.

"Sure! Lord only knows what that woman went through with before she gave up and laid down her hand," groaned Higgins, repentant.

"I could have guessed it," declared Lish, nodding his head. "You sure are a regular heller when you're loaded."

He sat with a great air of sympathy, waiting for Higgins to speak and then, as if fearful of

intruding on another man's past, timidly led him on.

"Of course, it ain't none of my business, Bill," he said, "but I'd sure like to have you tell me about her."

"I'm ashamed to," said Higgins, in a low voice, and still looking at the window, as if thinking of something, or seeing something of his past mirrored against the hills that were assuming shadows in the late afternoon sun. Then, as if eager to talk, he slowly turned and met the Mediator's eyes, and wet his lips.

"I've had time to do some thinkin' since you put me here, Lish Henley," he said, slowly, "and while you've done the best you knew how, and the sisters is all right, I miss Marthy. You see, her and me was married nigh on to twenty years ago, and she stuck and stood for an awful lot till about three years ago. You came to this camp about then. She'd left me over in Tucson, because I was gettin' worser and worser, and I don't blame her, either. She done right."

The Mediator again nodded as if heartily agreeing, and Higgins, highly repentant and reminiscent, rushed ahead as if to unburden his soul by confession.

"We was brought up over in Nebraska," he

said, almost as if to himself, " and her dad's farm was near my dad's farm. I was all right till I got to be about twenty, Lish. Never drank nothin'. Then I got to goin' with a bunch that liked the booze, and I took a little, and after a while I took more, and then I got so I'd get pretty well pickled. I kept my dad and Marthy from knowin' it for a long time. Then they talked to me, and I just laughed at 'em, and said I could get away with it without hurtin' myself. I was one of these smart guys what thinks he's different from other fellers, and can quit whenever he wants to, and all that sort of rot. They don't do it that way. You know it, Lish! But she believed in me, and married me, and we come West to get some land for ourselves."

He stopped for a moment, and his hands clutched the sheets and rumpled them, as if he were trying to control himself. Again he spoke, as if to himself.

" Lord! How Marthy worked! Scrub, and bake, and wash, and save; but we was happy because I was where I couldn't get the booze. Then the country settled up, and almost on our land came the railway, and then there was a station, and then a town, and with the town came the rum-sellers. By this time, we had so much

money that we was right prosperous, and it sort of swelled my head. And I wanted to be a big man in the town, and I got to bein' sociable, and that meant drinkin' a little now and then, then drinkin' more, and finally gettin' drunk pretty regular; but, somehow, I was different than I had been, because whenever I got drunk, I got quarrelsome, and fought. At first, Marthy only begged me to go slow and ease up. Then, she took to cryin', and that always made me sore when I had booze aboard, and then she got sort of hopeless like."

The Mediator scowled at the speaker, and Higgins caught the look of condemnation.

"That's right," he declared. "I'm a no-account hound, and know it. Well, then I began to blow in the money we'd saved, and by and by that was all gone. Then along comes a fellow and makes me an offer for the ranch, and I'm drunk, and I sell the place for half what it's worth. That's what booze did for me then. After that, I got used to tears, because I was drunk most of the time, and a drunken man has no pity. Sober times, I could have killed myself, so in the end, when drunk, I got uglier and uglier, and took out on others what I owed myself. So we came West again with what money was left — and there was

mighty little of it — and Marthy worked harder, and saved more, and I tried to brace up a little. Then, in a drunken row, I shot a man. Self-defense, all right, so I got off! Pity it was, because then they'd have hanged me, and Marthy would have had a little left. That feller had some friends, and they tried to get me. I had to shoot some more. That made me desperate. So then I drank more, and shot more, and then Marthy left me, and I turned loose worse than ever, half-hopin' that someone would kill me; because after she went I hated myself so much when I was sober that I had to get drunk to forget. Then I bump into you, and you was right to let me have it, and you've been so white since I've been lyin' here gettin' well that I want to tell you about it. I do, Lish. You're white, clean through!"

He was almost in tears when he concluded, and the Mediator looked uncomfortable. He tried to turn the conversation away from himself.

"Where is she now — your woman?" he asked, looking away from Higgins to save the latter embarrassment.

"At a place called Peaceful Hill, up in California."

Lish leaned forward on his knees in a meditative attitude.

"By Jimminy!" he said, at last, "that's the very place I want to go to! If they's anything I'm pinin' for it's peace. It's disgustin' the way they make a feller shoot all the time down here. It just does seem to me as if I've always got to be killin' somebody to keep them from killin' me."

The man on the bed smiled, remembering the reputation borne by this peaceful man of being the most deadly thing on two feet in the whole territory.

"You don't believe that, eh?" demanded Lish, cholerically. "Well, it's so! I'm dead sick of fightin' all the time, when I don't want to. What right's a quarrelsome, fightin', drinkin' walloper like you got to pick on a feller like me for? A feller that don't like to see nothin' fight, and would run himself, every time, if he wasn't afraid to run! You're a fightin' man! I ain't. I'm for peace! I wants to be let alone. Do you reckon if I had a good woman, I'd live in this-here camp an hour? No siree-e! I'd hit it out of here."

He got up and walked to the window and looked out for a full minute, then came resolutely back to the bedside.

"What are you goin' to do when you get out of here, Bill?" he demanded.

The patient shook his head, hopelessly.

"Well, ain't it about time you cut out this rum, and took to workin', and tryin' to show that woman that was no doubt ten times too good for you that you're good for somethin' besides a example of the evils of drink?" scornfully questioned the Mediator.

For a long time, Bill Higgins lay with his eyes shut, and Lish patiently waited.

"Lish," said the bad man, turning his face toward the Mediator, "you want to know what I'm goin' to do. Well, I'll tell you. I'm a good hard-rock miner. I'm goin' up to some place in California, where nobody knows me, and nobody'll ask me to take a drink, and I'm goin' to work. Goin' to save my money. Goin' to show Marthy that it's worth while to give me another chance; because, Lish Henley, I've had my lesson, and I'm eatin' my heart out for her! It seems to me I could die just to have her tell me, once more, like she used to when she was a girl, and I was a boy, that she loved me, and believed in me. . . . I wish you'd get to hell out of here!"

And the Mediator, as he walked slowly down

the street in the coming sunset, smiled with a great satisfaction, and said to himself:

"It was them flowers that done it! That's what it was! They sure walloped him right in the place where he keeps his heart!"

CHAPTER III

OFF ON THE QUEST

HIGH up in the mountains, so devoid of life and in such a profound silence that even the rustle of wind across a tiny grass clump sounded loud and harsh, stood a queer, ragged structure. Its upper part consisted of a tent, now weather beaten and patched, with a joint of rusty stove-pipe projecting from its peak. Its lower part was a patchwork of lumber from packing cases, with here and there strips of tin from melted cans. Inside, there was a corner where a floor had been started, and it was plain that this was being added to by degrees, as more baking powder and condensed-milk boxes became available. The part not covered was plain, trampled earth. A rickety bunk occupied one side of the interior, and above it was a convenient shelf for tobacco, cigarette papers, matches, cartridges, a horn spoon and similar impedimenta. A battered tin stove, some battered cooking utensils, a pile of tin cans, and a home-

made stool and table with oilcloth covering furnished the culinary department. But the place was not without decoration, for pinned here and there on sides and ends were lurid advertisements for everything from cartridges to tooth preparations, and each one was surrounded by frilled paper frames constructed with much care. In front of the abode was a porch effect contrived by tacking gunny sacks, salt sacks, flour sacks and pieces of overalls and blouses on a pole framework, and beneath this, reposing on his back in an attitude of peace, rested Mr. Elisha Henley, "At Home."

The sun had dropped behind the distant western peaks, and all of Mr. Henley's world had been painted rare colors, verging from golden yellows to soft purples — a giant canvas of wonderful beauty found scarcely anywhere else in such perfection; but the Mediator was not at the moment thinking of this scene. He rested on his side and elbow and stared wistfully at a dump that thrust itself out from the mountainside some hundred yards from his home, and that plainly signified much labor. Behind it a black hole, looking for all the world like a watchful eye in the face of the hill, told of a mine. Mr. Henley's view of his mine was suddenly cut off by something that saun-

tered lazily forward, and paused to look at the prospector, and the something was a marvelous mouse-colored old burro, with a gray face, soft, intelligent eyes, rounded body, and legs as delicate as a nymph's.

"Hello, Jack. Where in tarnation you been all day?" demanded the Mediator, with assumed anger. "You got to quit bummin' around the way you been doin' lately, or — or I'll send you to school! That's what I'll do!"

As if the threat had no terrors for him, Jack came daintily, languidly forward, stretched out his muzzle, and proceeded to nip at the Mediator's nose, his soft lips barely catching the tip of it. The man appeared to enjoy this evidence of affection.

"Go on, you old skeesicks!" he said. "Tryin' to kiss and make up, eh? All right, son, I won't send you to school."

Jack backed away to investigate a discarded milk can, and the prospector gave a great sigh. He twisted around, sat up, rolled a cigarette, and addressed himself to Jack, as was his habit when wanting to think aloud.

"Jack," he remarked, "something's got to be done. We cain't hold out much longer, old man. We owe most two thousand dollars down in Bur-

ton, an' they're gettin' shy when we ask for more grub. This here prospect ain't gettin' any richer, and it ain't goin' to. It's just a good low-grade mine, and it'll take a heap of money to get water to it. We ain't got no money. We've got some fellers comin' here to-morrer mornin' to look at it, and maybe they'll make us an offer of somethin' and we'd orter take it, and get out of debt; but, Jack, it'd most break our hearts to leave such a fine home as this is."

He stared up at the shelter he had constructed with such laborious pains in the three years he had occupied it, and back into the tent, and his face twisted a little with regret.

"There she is," he said in his soft mumble. "Ain't no finer home anywhere on earth. Reg'lar palace! Floor growin' every month. Art gallery like a king would have. Stove good for another six months, and that there bed suits me better'n any one I ever owned. Everything handy, too. Water only four mile off, and I can get enough grease wood in three days to last me for two weeks! There ain't no such home as this!"

He frowned at the hills around, and reached into his pocket, and took out a letter that he opened and read with great deliberation. It was in the

crabbed hand of a man who toils; but was easily deciperable.

DEAR LISH: Well, old friend, I am still here at the Keswick mines, and there are no better in California, to my way of thinking. I've fought it out, at last, and have kept my word given to you the day you got me out of the hospital there in Burton, took me to the train, and loaned me money to come here with. That's nineteen months ago, and I haven't taken a drink of any kind of booze, and don't ever intend to, and don't want it. The smell of the stuff makes me sick. But what I'm writing you about is this. Just a month ago to-day they made me foreman of the Keswick Queen and to-day they boosted my pay. I'm practically the boss. The supe likes me, and says so. I can have anything I want, and what I want most is a good assistant, and the only man I can think of is you. I told the old man about you and what you'd done for me, and he said to send for you right away. It's a good job, Lish, and you can make and save money up here. I wish you'd wire me right away if you'll come and take it. Of course if you're getting rich down there, you won't come. But if you ain't, get a hustle on yourself.

Yours to a cinder,

WM. HIGGINS.

P. S. I've wrote to Marthy but she won't answer. But I'm not giving up. I want her, Lish, and sometime she'll know that she needs me and that I need her, and she'll come back and see that I'm not the fighting drunken dog she had to leave. BILL.

For a long time, the Mediator sat there, absently staring at the deepening shadows and smoking as if to discover and outline some course of action. His deliberations, unvoiced, ran swiftly over the time since he had started Bill Higgins

away on the course that was to make of him a reputable citizen.

"He got away from it," he mused. "See what he is now! But I couldn't have done that, nohow, because it's so plagued hard for me to work for other men. He knows how. I always liked Bill, sober. And here's me, hankerin' for peace, with every bad man in five hundred mile wantin' to take a crack at me, seventy greasers itchin' to see me planted, a dozen Injuns covetin' my scalp, and plumb scared to go to the camp for grub for fear somebody'll up and shoot me. And Lord knows I've tried to be a nice sort of man, to pay my debts, and keep from fightin' right up to the last minute. What in thunder have I done that makes 'em pick on me? Seems to me like somebody's always gettin' my dander ruffed up, so's I have to either show yaller, or just naturally shoot 'em plumb full of holes. I'm itchin' for peace, I am!"

He sat up with a jerk, and his face brightened. He looked at the face of the dump, then around at the soft panorama of mountain and flat, and back at Jack.

"Peaceful Hill!" he almost shouted, and the burro lifted his head and looked at him with grave curiosity. "Peaceful Hill! That's the place.

And, by Crackey! Maybe I can persuade that Marthy Higgins to have a little sense. Must be a peaceful sort of place, and they ain't nobody goin' to pick on me up there. Nobody up there'll be wantin' to say he was the feller what put Lish Henley under the grass. Peaceful Hill!"

He walked out to the burro, stroked the long ears, patted the rough neck, and then stood for some time drinking in the whole landscape, as if already he were parting from it for the last time, as from an old friend. The candlelight glowed for a little while in the "reg'lar palace" then went out, and Jack, sleepily resting beside the tent, heard the stentorian sounds indicating that the Mediator had fallen asleep with a fine, untroubled conscience.

The sun had barely risen in the morning, and Jack had scarcely resumed his investigation of the empty cans, before smoke ascended in a gray cloud from the stove-pipe, and the Mediator, ruffled and rumpled, washed his face in a pint of the precious water from the barrel outside. He filled the olla and swung it back under the shelter, sliced the bacon, gave the rinds to Jack who had calmly entered the tent in expectancy, and threw a handful of black coffee into the blackened tin pot, before he heard voices ascending the trail.

"There they are," he said to Jack, "and that shows they *sabe!* They got an early start so's to beat the sun. Now, we'll see what they think of this-here hole in the ground!"

He stood in the doorway of his home, and saw three men approaching, one a leathery-faced, tanned, sinewy man with sharp eyes, and two others plainly less accustomed to saddles and early rides, the mining expert and his employers. Lish threw more coffee into the pot, and sliced more bacon, and heard them discuss the trip from Burton while they partook of his meager hospitality. They seemed real men, for which he was glad, and, furthermore, they were there to do business. It was not until after the meal was finished and he stood on the dump that he imparted any information.

"Well," he said, "there she is. I don't know exactly what that dump'll run, but accordin' to my figures, it's worth about three thousand, milled. That you fellers'll have to decide. It's on a flat floor so you can measure it, and I gave you a good average sample when you first asked for it."

The expert climbed down and inspected it, picked up numerous pieces of the ore, shook an approving head and said, "Mr. Henley, you are

a good, safe sampler. It ought to go even better than your sample."

"Always try to pick the worst rock so's not to bunco myself!" declared Lish. And the expert, staring at him, smiled, convinced that he was dealing with a truthful man.

"Now," said the prospector, reaching behind the timbers at the mouth of the drift, and taking out some candles, "I've only got two sticks, so you folks can fight for 'em, and the ones that loses has to carry candles in their hands. I'll lead the way and then it's up to you."

He took them back into the darkness, explaining as he passed that there were no sump holes, no sinks, and nothing but side drifts; that here they would find so much ore blocked out, and that there the ledge showed lean. He withdrew and left the expert and his employers as carelessly as if the sale of the property was of the smallest moment to him. His parting words were:

"You can measure, you can sample, you can do anything you want to. It's up to you."

In the face of his drift, he began the monotonous, one-handed drill work which wears the souls of men, but to which he was accustomed, while back from the hollows he heard the clink of the expert's prospecting hammer, the reverberating

sounds of voices, and the hollow beat of steps as the visitors inspected and searched into the work that he had done in the long period of effort. They waited for him to fire his shots at the end of the drift, and he invited the expert to accompany him back when it was certain that the powder fumes, deadly and headache-proving, had dissipated. He stood in the rear while the expert selected samples, and, late in the afternoon, saw him ride away with them, carefully tagged. He was not half as anxious to sell now as he had been on the previous evening; but, being of that type whose decisions are not subject to wavering, he viewed the possibilities without regret.

But the final pang came just a week later, when, with all his bills paid, and four thousand dollars in the belt around his waist, the Mediator prepared to depart. It seemed to him that the place never looked so homelike, nor the "reg'lar palace" so grand and comfortable. The very tin cans piled outside had eyes to stare at him. He wished he could put in a dozen more shots just to see how the ledge ran. He had a notion to work on the ground, no longer his own, until his food was exhausted. He was certain that had he but held on longer the ore might have fattened until he could find the way to make the mine a

big one. There was but one consolation in a dreary world, and this was that he was leaving the land of gun men with bad reputations behind, to start life all over again where everything would spell peace and every man be peaceable. He had wired Bill Higgins that he was coming and he vaguely wondered what it would be like to work for other men, to take their orders, and to draw their money. He had tried it, sometimes, for very brief intervals when fortune had not smiled, and, as far as he could recall, it had not been so difficult. Now, he was going to quit uncertainties, and wandering, and become like any other thrifty man — cautious, certain, and saving. He explained this to Jack as he dismantled his home of all that he proposed to carry away, his blankets, gold pan, horn spoon, tobacco, candlesticks, prospector's pick, and meager wardrobe. At the last minute, he returned and quite carefully took down the lithographs that constituted his "art gallery," and he took infinite pains to roll them so they would not be damaged.

"Come on, Jack. It's our last trip to the camp," he said, sorrowfully, as he turned down the trail after striving vainly to find some other excuse for remaining longer. "We been right happy here, ain't we, old pardner?"

But Jack, phlegmatic, and thinking of nothing save that he had something of a pack on his back, made no reply, and obediently followed his master.

They halted at the last turn of the hills that would let them have a view of their old home, and the Mediator looked back with sorrowful eyes at the white speck in the distance, seeming so alone and deserted. It had never looked like that before. It had suddenly become strange. It was no longer his. They were not coming back to it. It would be torn down by strangers and replaced by some big sheet-iron structure housing many men, none of whom would ever think of him and the years he had worked there in that hole in the hillside. He turned Jack around in the trail, and advised him to bid it good-by; but Jack merely nuzzled his master's hand as if advising haste before the midday heat.

As they approached the camp a new cause for perturbation assailed him. What on earth was he to do with Jack? This thought weighed him down as he came to the first of the straggling buildings, and then debouched into the single street of Burton that would pass the dozen or so saloons, the few merchandise stores, and the post-office. Men saluted him boisterously from the

doorways, and he answered with gravity, and trudged straight ahead to the railway station, where he led Jack to the watering trough beneath the tank, the very trough that he had been instrumental in securing for the thirsty ones, men and beasts, from off the desert wastes. He cautioned Jack to remain there in the shade, and walked determinedly into the waiting-room and up to the grated window.

"Hello, Jerry," he called through it, and the agent came toward him with a familiar grin. "Jerry," he said, "I'm in a heap of trouble. Jack and me's goin' to a place called Keswick, in Californy. How much do the tickets cost?"

Jerry fingered over some sheets, and quoted the price.

"One ticket, thirty-five plunks. Two tickets, seventy."

"But say, where will they let Jack ride?" demanded the Mediator. "In the express car?"

"Why, what in the deuce is Jack, anyhow?" demanded Jerry, staring at the Mediator as if thinking him mad.

At that moment, they heard the clatter of small hoofs, and Jack's head appeared in the door, smiling at his master as if to say, "Found you, did I?" Then, being wise as to the size of packs, he

halted, knowing that his burden could not clear the space.

"That's him," explained Lish, jerking his thumb toward the door.

The station agent, being an unfeeling man, doubled over and laughed, then, observing that Henley was very earnest, quoted the rules.

"Can't take him unless you ship him as express and crate him," he said.

"Crate him? Crate Jack? So he couldn't move around and rest hisself? Not by a dinged sight!" emphatically protested the Mediator.

"That's the rule," insisted Jerry. "No other way unless you hire a freight car, or hoof it."

"And can I ride with him in the freight car?" demanded Lish, hopefully.

"Sure you can, if you pay your fare."

"Then give me a car."

"But, say, Lish! That's pretty expensive. Why don't you sell the burro, or give him away?"

"Why don't you sell your mother, or your brother?" demanded the Mediator. "Who asked you about expense, Jerry? Lord, man, that ain't no common donkey. He's my friend, that feller is! Me and him's been together for five years; slept together; fed together; been drunk together before I cut it out; fought to-

gether; been busted together; had money together! Leave him! Humph! He'd never forgive me, I reckon, and there wouldn't be no place homelike for me without him. Nope! We travel together. Got the car?"

"Yes, there's one out there on the siding now. Train comes through in just two hours. Runway out there. I'll help you plant it so's to lead him up, unless you want to throw him in."

"Guess you ain't seen him kick none," remarked Lish, blithely. "If you had you'd start for the runway right now. Come on."

A few minutes later, Jack, to his surprise, was securely tied in one end of a clean box car, and the Mediator was up at a provision store, buying baled hay and straw, and explaining his needs. Also, he bought a barrel of water lest Jack go dry, and as a last thoughtful perquisite, a sack of cornmeal, explaining, as he did so, that Jack had always liked it.

"Maybe it'll keep the poor feller from gettin' homesick," he observed, hopefully. "I sort of expect he'll be all busted up leavin' here, because he don't know where we're goin' as well as I do."

He went back to the station, and paid his bill uncomplainingly, but mentally deciding that railroads should get rich if it cost so much to take

one poor little burro on a four- or five-day journey, and then as a happy afterthought, got out his beloved art gallery, and tacked the posters inside the car to give it a homelike appearance. He was sorry that he had not brought his cot and stove; but they were far behind, up there in the lonesome hut in the mountains. The proprietor of the Old Rest came down, followed by two Mexicans carrying a case of "sody-pop" and a huge chunk of ice. A provision dealer joined them, and lounged outside the car. A cowman with jingling rowels followed, and then two or three other prospectors of his own kind. The crowd grew as the news became bruited over the camp that the Mediator was departing, for good and all. Many of them bethought themselves of something to add to his comfort, and many others came merely for the satisfaction of seeing him go. There was quite a crowd when the train pulled in, and the locomotive switched his car back and coupled it into the train. The crowd gathered by the door again while the conductor went in to get his orders, and it was then that the Mediator made his long-remembered farewell speech.

"Boys," he said, standing in the doorway of the box car, with his white hat on the back of

his head, "be good! There ain't nothin' like bein' peaceful. I'm goin' to where I can get it, and you can bet your last dollar on that. There's a lot of you here that I like, and some that I don't like. Them that I liked, knowed it, and them that I didn't like, knowed it. I been around this camp a mighty long time, and they ain't no one can say I didn't always do all I knowed how to keep the peace."

He paused impressively and glared at them, and some of them grinned with joyous recollection of his manner of forcing the white dove to brood over that part of Arizona, and some others scowled and involuntarily turned to look at the graveyard up on the hill behind the town. The train began to move and his last words were uttered as he leaned far out of the moving car.

"Be peaceful," he shouted. "It's the finest thing in the world. The Good Book says forgive your enemies, and love one another. I'm right sorry to leave those of you who was my friends. All the rest can go plumb to hell! *Adios!*"

CHAPTER IV

AND PEACE COMETH NOT

LISH was a very subdued man on the day he arrived with Jack in Keswick, after many strange adventures, and reported for work. Men who did not understand had made fun of him as he rode with his burro, and asked him simple questions. Some of them had been sorry for it, when they recovered consciousness. Some of them had fathomed his quiet simplicity and been kindly, and those he remembered with much gratitude, and referred to their names, which he had inscribed in the little worn memorandum book that contained all his modest accounts. He was certain that all of these friends, at some time or another, might come by his place, and find proof that he was not the kind of a man who ever forgot a friend. Some of the others he wanted to forget, but couldn't. From Burton to Keswick, railway men told stories of him, and referred to him as the carload of dynamite they had carried

on such-and-such a date. His trip passed down into railway history as an eventful one, and there were those who referred to it as to a battle, and pointed to scars in proof of their having met the strange man who wielded such a mighty " punch." His quest for peace had not been auspicious up to the time of his arrival, but he brightened with hope on the day he assisted the complacent Jack out of the car, delivered him, temporarily, to a corral, and sought the reformed William Higgins, now the responsible foreman for a great mine.

" Well, Bill," he said, with a grin, as he looked through an office window, " I'm here all right. Top-side-up, with care. Jack come with me. He's boardin' down here with a right-nice feller. Got my blankets here, too."

He hoisted a bundle into view that made some of the clerks gurgle with delight, and took off his hat to wipe his forehead with his coat-sleeve. It shone white, in contrast with his cinder-blackened face, and for an instant Higgins' heart sank. The Mediator did not seem the heroic figure that he had remembered. But Higgins, grown to man's measure with his responsibilities, was not the one to weaken where an old friend was concerned, even if the old friend had won his esteem by nearly killing him. He busied himself in the

Mediator's welcome, and conducted him to his own quarters.

"There's two rooms here I don't use, Lish," he said, "and you can have 'em. Here's a bath-tub with runnin' water. In there's a closet for your own use. That red building you passed on the way up here is the store-house, and I'll tell 'em who you are and that anything you want you're to have. The supe, and you and me, and the assayer and the head millman eat at one table. I'll show it to you when the gong blows, and that'll be in about a couple of hours. I expect you want to take a bath, now."

"What for?" demanded the Mediator.

"Why you ain't so all-fired clean-lookin'," protested Higgins. "Come over here and look at yourself."

He led the way to a large mirror in the corner of the bathroom, and the Mediator followed meekly after him.

"Gee whiz, Bill! Ain't that a ringdinger of a lookin'-glass," he said. "Why, say! It's bigger'n the glass there in the Old Rest."

He might have passed away from it entirely unconscious of his own appearance, had not Higgins, wishing to present him in a cleanly plight, insisted on turning the water into the tub. And

into it Lish plunged, gurgling with enjoyment, and shouting through the flimsy partition that this was the first swim he had had since he left the Rio Grande River seven years before.

"Washin' in a gold pan ain't nothin' like this," he exulted. "This is sure the land of plenty, where you don't have to tote water in a barrel and save the drops from your hat rim. No siree! Lawsee! I wish I had this much water down at my mine!"

And then he remembered that he no longer had a mine, and that Arizona was ages and ages in the past, and millions of miles distant, and that he was on the step-stone of a new future where all was to be serene and peaceful, and he thoughtfully gathered himself to meet the new and strange conditions.

The settling process was not easy. He had not been there a week before he proved his efficiency and won the approval of the superintendent; but, somehow, the place was not as peaceful as he had anticipated. These miners were, for the most part, different from those he had known on the broad, free ranges of the South-west. They talked of unions, and union scales, and day's drives, and overcharges at the company's store. Many of them were foreigners to whom the Me-

diator could not talk. All that he could do was to prove to them that he knew what constituted a day's work. Some of the others borrowed his money, and from some of them he borrowed trouble. Many of them failed to understand him, in the least, for which he was sorrowful.

There were reports to make out, long slips of paper detailing the progress of scores of drifts, over which he puzzled his head, with fingers in his hair, and to fill which he chewed lead pencils into splinters until Higgins, grown suddenly grave and competent, relieved him of that portion of the work; for Higgins, somber, sober, and industrious, was intent on seeing that he fulfilled all recommendations. The former gun man treated him as a brother, and won from him an almost idolatrous affection; but the discipline, and the need for exercising it, chafed his spirit as a loosely tied diamond hitch chafes a pack animal. Often and often, when Lish visited Jack's boarding-house in the evening, he whispered his rebellion into the long hairy ears.

"It ain't that I ain't makin' good, Jack," he said, "because I am. I heard the old man talkin' to Bill this afternoon, and says he, 'that Lish Henley gets the work out of 'em, and knows a honest day's work, and insists on it's bein' done.'

That's what he says. But you see I ain't used to bein' bossed, and I ain't no good at bein' bossed! I want to do things my own way, and sometimes it seems to me that this here superintendent don't know what orter be done as well as I do. Then Hunks is awful. They'd starve to death where me and you come from!"

A month passed, and the second month, and his pay was increased; but it brought small gladness to the subdued spirit. Then came the third month, and that was the worst of all, and the month of complaint. A question came up between the union of miners and the mine-manager who promptly referred it to his board of directors. Lish was not present when the ultimatum was announced, but saw by the troubled face of Bill Higgins, in the house that evening, that something might be apprehended. It was while he was changing his rubber boots and stained blouse for comfortable garb that Bill explained it to him.

"The Queen's a union mine, as you know, Lish," he said, in a grumbling monotone. "And there's never been no fight about her. But she's gone deeper, and she works a couple of hundred more men, and the union wants a new scale. Well, the old man's hot-headed, and the feller the union's got here is hot-headed, and so they

both get sore, and now there's the devil to pay."

Lish pulled on a shoe before he answered.

"Maybe I'd best go and talk to both of 'em," he ventured. "I'm for peace. That's why that feller down in Arizony called me a Mediator. I'll just naturally go to this manager, and say, 'Don't be a dod-gasted bullhead. Listen to what the other feller's got to say.' Then I'll find this here union man, and say, 'Lookie here. You just better go and talk again and keep your mouth shut.' Then the fust thing they know, they'll get together, and there you are! That'll be all there is to it! Everything peaceful and nice. Work goes ahead just the same. Huh?"

Bill Higgins grinned, and shook his head.

"No, Lish," he said, "you don't understand these kind of men, and they can't understand you. You just let them tend to it."

In vain the Mediator argued for a chance to arbitrate; in vain he tried to see the doughty manager; in vain he tried to get the men to talk to him. The Keswick Queen was a simmering pot, waiting but a degree or two of heat to boil up to the edge.

It came on a morning when Lish, tired from a night's work, slept serenely in his room and dreamed of uncovering a ledge that glittered with

raw gold. The house was empty when he crawled out of the luxurious bed that had been his chief admiration, and slipped, barefooted, to the luxurious bath where water could be used with reckless prodigality. He whistled, melodiously, in a soft, thick volume of sound as he stepped out to the front of the commodious house apportioned to him and the foreman, and then stopped in amazement.

"Somethin's wrong," he said to himself, as he started for the mess-house to get his breakfast. "Stamps ain't droppin'."

And he was right, for the big mill was silent and the hills and forests no longer echoed to the roar of industry. He passed on down to the mess-house and called his cheery, "Hello, Charley!" to the Chinese boy that served him.

"All stlike!" declared the boy, coming toward him. "Laise hell down by hoist. Say killeee engineer."

"What? What's that?" demanded the Mediator, pausing when half-way seated in his chair. "Kill the engineer? What for?"

"Him no stlike. Him say pumps go all time. Melican man no make tlouble. Foreign man say, 'we killeee him — quick!'"

The Mediator looked bewildered for an instant,

then hurried to a window in the end of the mess-house, and looked out. It gave him a view of the big hoist, the boiler-rooms all squatted alongside like twisted giants bent low for their work, and the blacksmith's shops on the flat in front. But now the flat was filled with angry men, gesticulating, and twisting to and fro as if preparing for some violence. The plume of smoke above the engine-rooms was dull and pale. The trees on the hillside appeared to be bending over in suspense.

The Mediator grabbed his hat, and plunged down the declivity and across the valley intervening between the mess-house and blacksmith's flat. When half-way across, his generalship arose to the occasion, and he halted.

"Mustn't go that way," he said to himself. "I'd better go back and slip clean around so as to get into the boiler-room by the back door, and then I'll be where I can face 'em."

He retraced his steps around the scattered buildings of the Queen, and after what seemed to him a long time gained the rear. His face was scratched with brambles and bushes that had impeded his passage, and his splendid lungs were pumping vigorously when he came to the little opening in the building that he knew so well. It

was unlocked, and a strange silence pervaded the dark interior. The open doors of fire-boxes glowered at him, redly; but no fireman was in sight. From the engine-room adjoining, he heard the muffled, steady stroke of the pumps, still keeping the Queen from being flooded, and beyond that the threatening roar of the turbulent strikers.

Quite calmly, he walked the length of the boiler-room, and his lips were pursed as if to whistle. His face wore a look of perplexity, as if he could not understand why men should quarrel over anything, and he stopped long enough to pick a wrench from the floor and lay it on a joist at the side of the flimsy wall. He entered the engine-room through a low door, and saw a gray-haired, but undaunted old man, standing above his pumps, and recognized him as the chief.

"Hello, Tom," he called, as imperturbably as if this were an ordinary morning greeting. "Stickin' to it, are you? That's right!"

The engineer turned a grim face toward him, and the Mediator noted, with approval, that no evidence of fear was visible. He sauntered across to the double doors in front of the engine-house, and confronted the change. On one side of the door stood the manager of the mine, with a rifle in his hand, and on the other stood Bill Higgins,

big and formidable, with a heavy pistol. Farther over and with his back to the wall as if fearing a rush, stood the superintendent, also armed.

For a moment the keen eyes of the Mediator swept over the crowd of sullen men out on the flat, and he muttered to Higgins:

"All of 'em Hunks! Ain't none of the American boys there. Wish there was. Where are they?"

Higgins, without looking around, answered:

"They've tried to keep them fellers from makin' asses of 'emselves. They've gone over to the next mine to get some of the boys to come and help 'em clean this mob out. If we can hold out till then, there won't be no killin'. They want to throw old Tom down the shaft, and hear him fall a thousand foot."

"Whew!" the Mediator whistled, as if horrified. "After Tom, eh! That's right mean of them! Somebody ought to talk to 'em."

"Talk? Talk's no good. The old man went at 'em, and only r'iled 'em more," grumbled Higgins, in a low tone, as if fearful that the superintendent would overhear him. "We're fightin' for time. That's all. If we can hold 'em off —"

A sudden shout from the mob in front broke his speech, and distracted his attention. A

swarthy Hungarian, loud mouthed and waving his arms, ran up and down in front of the sullen ranks, and berated them in his strange tongue. The Mediator watched him for an instant, and recognized him.

"I never liked that feller," he drawled to Higgins. "I've seen him cut a heap of didos that I didn't like."

"They'll do what he says! He's the head of the whole fuss," remarked the manager, angrily.

The Mediator's steady eyes watched the disturber for a long minute, as the latter ranted up and down in front of his followers, now and then turning toward the engine-house and shaking his fist angrily at the little group of guardians. There was even a smile of contempt on the Mediator's face, and he fumbled in his pocket for tobacco and a cigarette paper, and said, "Pshaw!" when he found that he had left these important articles behind.

"He's the one that will give us trouble," agreed the superintendent, watching the demagogue. "If they stick to him, it's off with Tom."

"And with us," growled Higgins, watchful and alert.

"Then, if that's the case," declared Lish,

cheerfully, " there's just one thing to do, and that's to find out! "

Before any of those at the door could stop him, before they could utter a word of warning or protest, he slipped past them, and hurried across the open space, directly toward the giant who was exhorting his followers to attempt a rush. Little and outclassed, the Mediator looked as he ran valiantly across the flat, and, astonished, the strikers saw him coming and stood still as if paralyzed by his temerity. The foreman uttered a shout of warning.

" Hey! Come back here! " he roared.

" Henley! Henley! Look out! " shrieked the manager.

But their cries were unheeded by the Mediator who, without hesitation, rushed ahead toward the Hungarian who confronted him.

" You get out! " yelled the Mediator, shaking his fist up toward the big man's nose. " You're no good! You're fired! Get off the dump, before I throw you off! "

The Hungarian made a wild swing with his fist as if to knock the intruder out of existence; but Lish ducked nimbly under the arm and toward a man in the front rank who stood leaning on a pick handle. He butted into the latter with

the velocity of a catapult, and seized the pick handle and wrested it from his hands. Almost in the same motion he whirled and leaped at the startled leader, who threw his hands outward in an attempt to seize the dangerous cudgel. It was useless; for even while it was in mid-air, Lish leaped sidewise, feinted, side-stepped, planted his feet, and brought the white-ash stick down on his opponent's head. The giant reeled, and lifted his hands to protect himself, but now the white ash flew up again and again, raining blows on the body, battering the arms to uselessness, and finally descending on the unprotected head. The giant fell as if he were an ox stricken by the slaughter, a limp heap in front of his followers. They stood aghast at this downfall of the champion, and Goliath's followers were no more surprised by the victory of David; but the difference between David and the Mediator was that the latter was not the man to pause and wait for his laurels, or to perform deft decapitations. He was one who took advantage of his gains without waste of time.

"Get out!" he roared, in a voice that seemed magnified for the occasion. "Get off the ground, or I'll get sore and kill a dozen of you! Go, I say!"

The cudgel now lifted itself again and banged the head of the nearest man, who dropped alongside the giant. It played in and out, seeking unprotected spots on others. The Mediator was like a living rapier, here and there, up and down, leaping sidewise, backward or forward, with equal celerity, and everywhere he passed men gave, tried to protect themselves, fought and fell, or found refuge in flight. For an instant, the battle wavered, and then, roaring like a bull, fearful for his friend, angry beyond bounds, Bill Higgins came to the rescue. Right and left they struck, the stocky little Mediator, who fought silently, and the big man, who swore loudly and cursed every man he hit. They mowed a lane — they doubled back — they turned to the sides, they battered the flanks and flying rear; for the men who would have murdered an engineer had no stomach for being murdered, and so ran. Behind them came the dull thud of the pick handle, and the angry impact of Higgins' fists. Behind them lay men who were either suspiciously still, or who turned and wove around on hands and knees. Urging them to greater speed was the roaring voice of the infuriated foreman, and the war cry of the Mediator, who had at last given tongue.

"Want to fight, do you?" he kept shouting. "Well, take that! And that! We want peace around this mine! We're goin' to get it! Wow! There you are!"

The mob fled down the roadway pursued by the short-legged man and his big friend until the latter twain, out of breath, stopped like a pair of tired bulldogs and faced each other. Blood was streaming down the face of the man of peace where someone had hit him with a rock, and Higgins' face was red and insane with anger and anxiety.

"Lish! Lish, are you hurt bad?" he panted, dragging a handkerchief from his pocket and wiping the Mediator's face. "If you are, I'll kill the man that done it!"

The Mediator staggered for an instant, then looked gratefully up at the big man, and drawled:

"I always was fond of you, sober, Bill. But, Lordy! Think what they'd have done to us if you'd been drunk."

He seemed dazed by over-exertion, and it was the manager and superintendent of the big Keswick Queen, important personages both, who supported him to the house on the hillside, and put him to bed, where, quite tired, he went to sleep. It was the manager and the superintend-

ent who came to him quite gratefully, in the evening, to voice their thanks.

The Mediator crawled out to meet them with a very red suit of flannel underwear exposed, and a bandage around his head.

"We've got the strike settled," declared the manager, "and the men are giving in half-way, and I meet them the other half! They all go to work to-morrow. There's nothing around this mine that either you or Higgins can't have! You're the man who saw the right thing to do, Henley!"

The Mediator sat grumpily on the edge of his bed for a moment, and wiggled his bare white toes.

"I didn't do the right thing," he growled. "What I should have done was to beat you over the head, first! Next, there's nothin' around this here mine I want. I'm done. I quit — right now. I ain't no fightin' man! All I'm lookin' for is peace! This ain't no place for me. I'm goin' away from here, I am. Me and Jack'll pull out of here to-morrer, we will. You can go to the devil with your job! We're goin' to that place they call Peaceful Hill. We ain't no good workin' for nobody else, nohow. And that goes!"

CHAPTER V

WHERE THE ROOF IS THE SKY

THE Mediator with a nice round place shaved on the side of his head, and the round place decorated with court-plaster, was out bright and early on the morning after the end of the strike, and could have been found draped carelessly over the board fence of a corral at about ten o'clock. All importunities voiced by the redoubtable manager of the Keswick Queen, the stolid superintendent, and the big foreman, had been inflexibly met with the statement that he had discovered that he was "no good workin' for other folks," and money inducements he scorned. Indeed, for the first time since he had arrived in Keswick, he seemed completely happy and care-free. His expression was as joyous as that of a boy released for his summer vacation. He whistled softly, smoked, and loafed with an air of fascinating contentment. The world had stretched inviting arms out to him, spread

glamourous trails leading into unknown and alluring distances, and whispered pleasant tales into his ears. And the heart of the wanderer had leaped in response. He was going to "hit the trail" again. He was done with being "bossed," even though there had been scarcely any restraint on his movements in those weeks he had conscientiously passed in the employ of the Keswick Queen.

"I've got to have somebody to help Jack," he meditated, as he leaned over the corral fence, "and I want to pick out some feller that he likes. I'll hang around here a while till he shows his preferments."

And so, for an hour, Mr. Henley watched the burros in the corral, as they dozed here and there, or wandered aimlessly around, or fought, or sauntered over to where, with friendly intent, he stood.

"That's the feller Jack likes best," he said to himself, at last, observing that Jack appeared to have a predilection for about the poorest burro in the yard. "It's that old gray mucker there. Bet he's got Methusalem lookin' like an infant; but, hang it all! if Jack likes him, reckon I can stand for him."

He called the corral-owner to his side.

"Who's that old feller over there — the one by my burro?" he asked, pointing at the old one.

"Him? That's Pete. He's for sale," was the reply. "But why don't you pick out a good one?"

"What's the matter with him?" demanded the Mediator.

"Nothin' except he's old."

"Is he a nice old feller?" queried Lish. "Mean? Pilferin', balky, bitin', or anything like that?"

The dealer laughed.

"Nope. He's all right; but he's old. He belonged to old Specimen Jones that died here about a month ago. Specimen and him was sort of fond of each other. Specimen must have had that burro when he started prospectin', and they do say he was at the game for nigh on to a hundred years, or maybe more. Public administrator left Pete here to be sold."

"That settles it," declared the Mediator. "I ain't runnin' no home for aged and impoverished mules, but that old cuss ought to fall into good hands. He ought to be with somebody that'd appreciate him. I like him. I see now why Jack's so fond of him. Jack's always been care-

ful about pickin' his company. He don't want any drunken, fightin' bums hangin' around him. No, siree-e!"

"Well," said the dealer, "I can't exactly say that I ever saw Pete drunk. It'll cost you fifteen dollars to get him."

Lish paid for the new burro with some of the money he had earned at the Queen, climbed the fence, and made his way to his new purchase. He ran his hand along Pete's back and noted the pack-saddle scars, lifted the tiny legs and inspected the hoofs, and threw an arm over the patient neck.

"It's all right, Pete," he confided. "You and me and Jack's goin' to be friends. I'm goin' to take you out of this hole. It ain't no place for a decent, self-respectin' old feller like you, nohow. If I didn't take you some feller might come along that'd be mean to you, and, for the sake of old Specimen Jones, we ain't goin' to let that happen."

He got around and held the burro's face up so that he could look into the soft eyes, and added, whimsically:

"You're hired. Jack's goin' to be the foreman. You're the gang. I'm the manager. Come on."

He whistled to Jack, who obediently came to his heels, caught Pete back of the ears, and led the way to the big gate. Through it they passed, and Pete, as if wise and comprehending, trotted along beside Jack, as the latter delightedly followed the Mediator up the street, and away toward the mine that was no longer a part of his everyday life.

They paused long enough to purchase and fit a pack saddle and some fresh tarpaulin, and then went to a supply store where the beans, bacon, flour, baking powder and other necessaries were selected, rolled into the tarpaulin, and made into a well-ordered pack. The deft hands of the Mediator threw the diamond hitch, and Pete appeared to appreciate a master's hand as he settled himself to his load, and smiled wisely at Jack.

Up at the house that had the wonderful bathtub, Lish made another pack, and loaded it on top of the restless Jack, who, with the contempt of long familiarity, nipped at the folds of the Mediator's shirt. The Mediator went back into the comfortable home that had been his, and that he was so carelessly abandoning. The walls looked bare, now that he had denuded them of his "art gallery," and the bed was tumbled and

tossed where he had dragged off his blankets. He halted in the door, and looked the place over with a critical eye — the eye of the old trail man — to see whether he had left any valued possession behind.

"All set," he said. "Everything ready. You've been a good room, best, I reckon, that I've ever had! But after all, you're nothin' but a house! It ain't your fault because you can't help bein' what you are; but you're just plain house. And the air don't come through you from all sides, and I ketch cold in you, and you shut out the songs of the pine trees at night and the whistles of the birds in the mornin'. Your sides don't move when the wind blows, and — hang you! you keep out all the rain. The trouble with you is, that you're too cussed good! If you'd only leak once in a while, or act as if you were goin' to fall down, or do somethin' to make me think you was workin' hard to be a shelter, I might have liked you; but you didn't, and so now I'm goin'. Good-by!"

He passed out to the open front door, and smiled as he saw that everyone around the Keswick Queen was working as if there had never been a strike, or a threat of one. He ran down to the mess-house to bid the Chinese boy good-

by, and returned to the cabin, just as Higgins, looking gloomy and distressed, appeared.

"Lish," protested Bill, rather hopelessly, "I'd hoped right up to now that you wouldn't go. Don't be a fool, man! Stick here. Why, say! you can have anything you want around here, after yesterday. The old man's for you to the finish. He told me to keep you from goin', no matter what it cost. Says he to me, 'Bill, there's a real man. Give him anything he wants, but keep him here. He's the kind we can depend on. He's the best man we've ever had on the works. If it's money, he can have more. If the house don't suit him, we'll get him another one that will. If the hours ain't right, let him make his own. Anyhow, keep him. Find out what's the matter with him, and fix it.' That's what the manager of this mine said to me, this mornin'. Now, Lish, what the devil is it that ails you?"

His air was almost belligerent as he put his hands on his hips, and looked down at his old-time friend. It was as if he challenged the latter to name something that could not be granted. But the Mediator blinked up at him, then looked at the burros who stood patiently in front of the doorway, awaiting his direction.

"There ain't nothin' ails me, Bill," said the wanderer, lowering his fearless eyes for once, as if a trifle ashamed of his desertion, "except that I cain't stand it. I've got to be outside. I've got to be some place where there ain't so dog-gone many people. You see, Bill, I ain't used to makin' people do what I think they'd orter. I ain't cut out to be a boss over nobody but mules. I don't know how. I'd like it, if I could make fellers do things for me because they loved me; but they don't. They do it because, somehow, I have to make 'em afraid. And the things men does for you because they're afraid of you, don't count, nohow. You'd do it, Bill, because you understand, but the others don't. I was nice to them fellers. I didn't do nothin' to 'em except tell 'em they had to work, and then, you saw how it was, yesterday, I had to hammer it into 'em with a pick handle. I don't like to have to hurt folks. It messes things up so, and as soon as it's all over, I'm so plague-goned sorry I could sit down and cry about it."

He looked sorrowfully at the ground, then appealingly upward at the dark eyes that met his, and seemed to be ashamed of having so openly voiced his soul.

"You've been good to me, Bill, and they all

have, but there's somethin' else. You cain't understand it, I'm thinkin', but I want to be out under the sky, and the trees, and where I can make friends of the birds, and livin' things that's all around me. Them's the places where I have peace. And runnin' water! I like to sleep where there's a stream, because in the night I can hear it sayin' things, and singin' nice little songs, and tellin' me all about the bowlders it met farther back in the hills and what they said to it as it came hustlin' along on its trip. Nope, Bill, it ain't no use! I ain't cut out for it, and I'm goin'."

He pretended to have discovered something wrong with one of the packs, and plunged out to Pete's side, and bent over; but he did not in the least deceive Bill Higgins, who stood in the doorway, looking as if something was being wrenched from his reformed life.

"And, Bill," called the Mediator, as he straightened up and rested a hand on the clean tarpaulin, "there's one thing more I want to say before I go. It's about that Marthy of your'n. Don't give up! Keep after her! I ain't particularly wise about women, but I've noticed that it's the feller who makes it so damn hot for 'em they cain't rest that usually gets 'em. You just

make it hot for Marthy. Sometime she'll melt like a can of lard in hell, and then you can scoop her in."

He walked up to Jack's head and said:

"Well, boys, here we go."

"But, Lish, where are you goin'?" demanded Higgins, coming down from the doorstep as if still hopeful of checking the adventurer.

"By Crackey!" exclaimed the Mediator. "That's somethin' I hadn't thought anything about, at all. Where does this road go?"

"That road," said Bill, reluctantly, "leads southward." He paused as if he had thought of that long trail on many occasions, when the world was a despondent one, and added, softly: "It goes, if one follows it long enough, to Peaceful Hill. And that's ten thousand miles away."

The Mediator's face brightened, and a slow smile crept up into the wrinkled corners of his eyes, and around the firm lips.

"Ged-dap, boys!" he said to the burros, with a friendly nudge. "This trail's the one we'll take. It's as good as any other."

And, without looking back for even so much as a wave of the hand at big Bill Higgins, he started away, little whorls of dust arising when

his feet struck the road, little clouds of smoke rolling backward from his cigarette, and his eyes lovingly searching the sky line, as if eager to behold what the mountains might conceal.

CHAPTER VI

STIRRING UP THE PEACEFUL PROSPECTOR

Up on the Big Divide, the camp of Peaceful Hill slumbered peacefully in the afternoon haze, and was all unconscious that, plodding down its main street, with a philosophical eye cast to right and left, had come the Mediator. The Widow Callahan, who did the camp washing, first saw him. She paused, with a mouthful of clothespins, after deftly hanging a faded, dripping blue shirt on the line and stared at him. Not that prospectors were such rarities, but because this one looked different. Apparently he wanted to say something. He calmly walked toward the weather-beaten fence that kept her domain sacred from the intrusions of the road, which in muddy seasons was inclined to wander, irrespective of property rights, across front-door stoops and gardens, as teamsters strove to find footing for sweating teams. He was followed by two pack burros that expressed a predilection for his com-

pany, or acted as if they were afraid to be left alone and unprotected in such a wildly exciting and metropolitan situation as a street in a dozing camp.

He leaned amiably across the weather-beaten fence and grinned at her, one of those grins that show white teeth from under a straggling mustache out of a patch of brown, leathery face. He cleared his throat loudly, as if the granite dust of a long journey had parched his throat.

"Good-day, ma'am," he began politely. "Can you tell me how far it is to the nearest saloon?"

"I can," she answered with acerbity, after removing the clothespins, "and likewise I have no use for a man who drinks. It's the curse of the devil, whisky is. A man that drinks is no good. Not that a body needed to look twice at you to know. There's one just beyond the corner. It's run by a blackguard named Holliday, bad luck to him!"

"Thanks!" he replied imperturbably. "Now can you tell me whether there's a waterin' trough in front of it? Most of 'em keeps waterin' troughs. Sort of a drink-for-man-and-beast deal, I reckon. I want to get a drink for them burros. They're right thirsty, ma'am, them mules is."

At this ingenuous explanation she softened half-credulously, and then shook her head, very emphatically.

"Now, when Mike Callahan was alive," she said thoughtfully, "I thought he had given me all the excuses there were for findin' saloons; but this is the first time a man ever asked because he wanted to give his burros a drink."

She stooped over to pick up another garment from the basket at her feet; but the stranger did not move.

"My name's Henley," he said; "David Elisha Henley; but the boys mostly call me Lish."

The widow looked up at him.

"Oh, you're there yet, are you?" she said. "Well, what of it?"

"And I kind of wonder if you know anybody by the name of Higgins — Mrs. Marthy Higgins. I sort of come out of my way to have a talk with her."

Mrs. Callahan stopped and frowned thoughtfully.

"It does seem to me there's a woman by that name who's cookin' for the Canady Hill Mine," she said. "It's 'way up on the Divide — 'most fifteen or eighteen mile from here. They can tell you down at 'most any store."

She resumed her work, and still David Elisha Henley paused. Again she looked up.

"Well, what are you waitin' for now?" she asked.

"Just wanted to thank you when you warn't so busy," he said. "It's been right good of you to tell me where this Marthy and the saloon and the waterin' trough is. Hope I can do the same for you sometime. Good-day, ma'am."

She appeared mollified by this remarkable courtesy sufficiently to wish him a polite good-day as he turned away, with his patient burros still following like two miniature mountains laboring along under their worn packs. As he walked it was patent to John Martin, owner of the Cricket Mine, boss and judge of men, who passed him in the roadway, that the newcomer was something of a physical study, for there was no more than five feet of him perpendicularly, with peculiarly broad, sloping shoulders and a pair of ridiculously lithe legs. The torso was quite like a barrel. And premonition told Mr. Martin nothing, even when he was wished an exceptionally polite "Good-afternoon!" by the man in the dust. There was no mistaking that prospector type.

And Mr. Henley, as he passed along, eyed with

a very satisfied eye the beauties of a camp that led out for the most part in one main street, bordered by fine old trees, weather-warped old houses, sun-dried old board walks, and signs that were nearly illegible. He could not refrain from voicing his satisfaction to the lead burro, thereby indicating that he had discovered that animal to be a gentleman with an observing soul, and a companionable understanding.

"This looks like the place, Jack," he said; "the place we've been looking for. There's a schoolhouse over yonder where probably they teach kids to read and write and figger a little. That shows this is a home town. There's a real meetin' house over beyond it with a bell in that thing that looks like a dog's house, and that shows they are church folks. Maybe they sing hymns in there on Sunday. There's a store there with a porch in front of it, and a fat man fannin' himself with a palm leaf, that makes me believe there's a circus comes here once in a while. That shows the town is for entertainment and culture. There's an old soak asleep out on the porch in front of the saloon two doors up, and that shows that the folks that live here is all liberal, and don't interfere with a man's enjoyin' himself in his own way. Then up there alongside the road is a

waterin' trough, which sure indicates to me they're kind to animals. We been huntin' a peaceful place ever since they run us out of Keswick with their awful brawlin', and this seems to be the spot. I'm for it! Let's mosey over yonder and get that drink."

As if he had understood the whole summary, the burro hastened his steps, and made for the trough into which cold water, piped down from some mountain spring, gurgled rapturously, and joined a duet with the overflow from the lower end. The other burro, who appeared to be a phlegmatic sort of person, and given to nothing but work, joined his fellow in a drink, plunging an aged gray muzzle into the cooling flow, and the prospector advised them to "go to it," and walked around the end. He stepped up on the creaking porch, saw the sign, "Happy Home," on the window, and went in. A tall, lank man was asleep, with his elbows on his arms over the worn bar.

Lish smiled sympathetically. He could understand sleep. He had manifested the habit on many occasions.

"Hey, you!" he bawled, in a stentorian voice.

The man who had been dozing suddenly let out a yell that shook the glassware, landed on

his feet immediately in front of the cash till, and at the same time whipped a wicked-looking gun into sight in a dangerous line with Henley's head. The latter, with equal celerity, stretched both hands skyward, and his face lost its habitual good humor.

"Hold on, pardner! Don't press the trigger!" he admonished. "I'm right sorry I disturbed you. I didn't mean nothin' by it, you know."

The man rather sheepishly lowered his weapon, and his eyes lost their wildness. He threw the gun back on the edge of the shelf, and then apologized.

"I'm a bad sleeper," he said. "Sometimes when I'm woke up that way I come right out of shaky dreams, and — well, I just can't get over it! What'll you have, stranger?"

The invader's arms came down slowly, and his eyes betrayed a certain watchfulness, as if anticipating further belligerent action; then he explained his wants.

"I'd like a bottle of sody pop — the red kind. Sarsparilly is my favorite, but if you ain't got that, I'll take rosberry."

The owner of the Happy Home smiled at him with a certain air of tolerance.

"On the water wagon, are you?" he asked solicitously. "Well, sody pop's about the only thing we ain't got. Maybe you'd like a lemonade? It's right steadyin' to the nerves. Chunk of ice in it makes it colder. Ever try it?"

He leaned across the bar, and gazed commiseratingly into the customer's face, as if conveying a great and boonful information. He seemed relieved when told that would do.

"I've come a right long way to get here," Lish volunteered, in the interest of sociability. "The first time I heard of this place was when I was down in Arizony. It was an awful camp, what with the fightin' men they had there, and gun men and gamblers. The name Peaceful Hill struck me right hard. Then I started for it, and I've been nigh on to two years gettin' here, what with all the stops I had to make; but here I am. Says I to myself: 'If there's any peaceful place on God Almighty's earth, I want to get into it with both feet, because I'm for peace — first, last, and all the time!'"

The proprietor of the Happy Home grinned sympathetically, and shoved a decoction of acid, sugar, and water across the bar, and, without invitation, and in the interests of promoting business, poured out a drink of villainous-smelling

whiskey for himself, and with an absent-minded manner took a liberal price for two drinks from the wayfarer's money. Inasmuch as Lish made no objection to this polite robbery, the saloon man ventured to hope he would like the camp, and remain there forever.

"There ain't no place like this here Divide for a good prospector," he explained with enthusiasm, when asked to repeat the drinking performance. "The Forty-niners scratched and pawed over the top of the ground, and got all the easy money; but pshaw! they wa'n't miners. They was just plain pikers and farmers from down East. The Native Sons don't get up this way very often. It's too far off the railway. They don't like that thirty or forty miles of Divide. So, you see, you got the whole blamed country to look at. Minin's pickin' up around here lately. Go to it, says I."

It sounded as if the proprietor of the Happy Home owned all that vast sweep of mountains, and was presenting them all to the newcomer. And the newcomer was accordingly gratified. He bethought him of the woman in whom he was interested.

"Do you happen," he asked, "to know a woman by the name of Marthy Higgins? Wid-

der she is, or just the same, because she and Hig don't get along none."

Holliday frowned thoughtfully at a stuffed owl that was the chief decoration of his bar, and took a long time to answer.

"Nope," he replied; "I don't know as I know her. She don't never drink in my place."

Lish hastened to give her character.

"Oh, she's a real teetot'lar," he declared. "Leastwise, that's what Hig gave me to believe. She's not a drinker. She's a cook. Yes, siree. She cooks at some place called Canady Hill Mine."

"Likely-lookin' old girl? Kind of a blonde, with weepy eyes, about fifteen hands high?"

"Never saw her."

"Well, there's some sort of a she-woman up there cookin'. Makes the best dried-apple pies anybody's ever made, so old Channel Smith told me. He's minin' up near there, and he ain't never forgotten his early trainin'. He was from away down East, Channel was, and the way he hankers for apple pie is somethin' awful. Pore old Channel! Been burrowin' into the hill up there for more'n forty years, expectin' to find an ancient river bed that'll be solid gold. Never spends no money except for apple pie."

He shook his head sadly, and Lish thought perhaps it was because he regretted the frailty of pie expenditure when the money might have been more virtuously squandered in the Happy Home. He arose to the defense of Channel Smith.

"Can't see as he ain't got a right to spend his money on pie," he began, "if his taste —"

There was a sudden commotion outside the door. Growls, howls, whines, and barks blended into a mad crescendo of sound. He rushed to the door, and looked out, to discover a lively dog fight in full progress, with two combative mongrels snapping and tearing in an excited ball that bounded backward and forward over a ten-foot space. The whole camp appeared to have awakened to the occasion, and doorways were filled with men who hilariously enjoyed the entertainment. Some of them were hastening for a closer view, and by shouts and hisses encouraging the combatants.

Lish ran out and tried to separate the animals. He reached down to get one of the dogs by the legs, but lost his footing, and fell forward. The dogs fought farther away, and out toward the end of the trough, where the pack burros stood watching them with an interest scarcely less than that of the townsmen. The burro, Jack, laid

back his ears as they came toward him, suddenly switched his hind quarters around, and landed a vicious, double-heeled kick on the fighters that lifted them into the air like a rocket, and parted them most effectually. They landed on their feet in an agony of surprise, and, yelping the complaint of their injuries to the heavens, bolted madly away in opposite directions.

"Now you see what you done!" exclaimed an angry voice behind the prospector, who turned to discover a burly, red-faced, angry individual frowning at him. "One of them was my dog. He goes to lick another dog, and you butt in. It wa'n't none of your business! Then you shove 'em over till that mule of your'n, bein' as big a fool as his boss, lams 'em with his heels. For two cents I'd kick you twice as hard!"

The crowd had closed up in the pleased expectation that a man fight would satisfy the unfilled longings for a dog fight, and evidently they regarded the outcome as certain, much to the disparagement of the newcomer.

"Pshaw, pardner, you don't want to feel that way about it," remonstrated Lish. "I don't like fightin' of any kind. Most of all I hates to see poor dumb brutes tear at each other just because they don't know better. Why, man! You

1169

don't mean to say you believe in fightin', do you?"

The almost plaintive drawl of his voice appeared to aggravate the owner of the dog to further anger, for he shook his fist under the sunburned nose of Lish, and threatened to grasp that unoffending protuberance between his hard fingers and twist it.

"That's got nothin' to do with it! If you hadn't gone and tried to grab my dog's legs he'd made sausage outen that other hound in just three shakes of a lamb's tail."

The prospector's hands were still at his sides, and apparently he proposed to adhere to a line of pacification.

"Jack and me's just alike," he drawled calmly. "We don't believe in quarrelin'. He just naturally had to do all he could to keep the peace, and that was his way of doin' it!"

Some of the crowd began to jeer the advocate of peace, and indulge in camp witticisms at his lack of spirit; but he stood unmoved, while the owner of the dog, emboldened by his attitude, or perhaps longing for a clash, called him all the names in his vocabulary, thereby proving that his selection of epithets was remarkably ugly.

"Take a wallop at him, Bill," advised one of

the by-standers, addressing the belligerent one, and at the same time nudging the man nearest him, who grinned hopefully.

"No, don't do that, Bill," objected Holliday, who stood on the vantage ground of the steps of the Happy Home. "Let him alone."

The man called Bill turned around to address a few pithy remarks to Holliday; and, taking advantage of the lull, Lish stepped out to the open space beside his burros. He noticed that the hitch on the older animal threatened to become loosened, and started to tighten it. Just then Bill, loath to let his meek prey escape so easily, stepped around the end of the trough and hauled off and kicked the wondering Jack.

"Take that for kickin' my dog!" he shouted, as the burro, unused to such roughness, shied violently to one side. And then the loungers lost sight of the burros in what followed.

The advocate of peace catapulted through the air like a bomb fired out of a Fourth of July mortar. He appeared to leave the ground in his progress, and soar upward in order to land his full weight against the prominent red jaw of the man called Bill. He came so hard that the spat of his impact sounded like the snap of a whip, and his rapidity was something so remarkable

that Bill had not time to lift his hands for defense; yet, so big was his bulk, that he did not fall, but reeled backward, trying to recover his dazed and astonished wits, and gather himself for his own protection.

Even this proved a futile hope, for so amazing was the quickness of the newcomer, that before he could even poise himself he was struck twice more, with bone-breaking, heavy, fierce, agonizing blows that drove him back like a meal sack battered by the onrush of a practising goat. His legs showed signs of weakness, his knees seemed to have lost their support, and his body began to sag groundward; but that did not mitigate his punishment, for the prospector poised himself with professional proficiency on his feet, appeared to calculate his distance, time his blow, and carefully aim it, and then, quite deliberately but firmly, landed it deftly on the unprotected chin.

The big man's hands flew upward, and nothing but the fact that he was already half-down prevented him from first striking on the back of his head as he took the ground, a limply sprawling, useless, conquered mass of brawn and bone.

The crowd in sheer bewilderment gave suppressed but excited exclamations. There was a moment's stillness, in which time the newcomer

stared at his prostrate tormentor as if to satisfy himself that this part of his task was over, and then looked up at them.

"I really don't know what would have happened to this feller called Bill if I'd hit him when I was angry," he said apologetically. "Pshaw! It's too bad! And, by the way, has any of you other fellers got a notion he'd like to kick one of my burros? I sure hope there ain't, because I'm a man of peace. I hate quarrelin' worse'n a rattler hates a hair rope!"

He looked them over mildly, and yet with such a promising air of readiness should any of them tender the suggested offense, that they backed away a little bit, and stood watching him.

"Well," he drawled, "they ain't no use in my standin' here this way, like a man with a mule instead of a chip on his shoulder. I reckon I'd better 'tend this feller Bill. I'm always right sorry for a man I have to hit. I couldn't do much for the last one before this, because all we could do was to send him to the morgue."

He walked over and got his arms beneath the shoulders of the fallen Bill, and dragged him as carelessly as a bale of hay to the water where the spring guttered through the iron pipe as carelessly as if nothing had happened. He hoisted the en-

sanguined Bill's head to its edge, and then doused it into the water, and, jerking the bandanna handkerchief from his own neck, used it as a sponge to repair the wreckage.

Bill gave a gasp, opened his eyes, and stared in bewilderment around him. Even then he retained some of his spirit.

"Did that mule of yours kick me?" he asked, and then, as his wits came back: "Oh, no! It warn't the mule, after all. It was you!"

He sat on the edge of the trough, and the crowd snickered softly, but calmed itself at the fiercely inquiring look swept over it by the prospector.

"I seem to remember that you hit me with somethin'," Bill went on, "and I reckon it must have been an ax."

There was another instant's silence as his wits returned more fully, and then he looked up and grinned sarcastically, though with difficulty through his puffed lips.

"It's the most astonishin' thing," he said to his conqueror and good Samaritan, "how many fool mistakes a feller can make. Any time after this I get a fool hankerin' to kick another man's mule, I'll pick out one belongin' to a cripple!"

The prospector saw that the man was able to

n always right sorry for a man I have to hit. I couldn't do much for the last one before this, because all we could do was to send him to the morgue."

minister to his own wants, and calmly walked ay to his burros.

"Come on, boys," he said; "let's go and find :orral somewhere."

As if they understood him, they obediently fol- ved him down the street, leaving the gaping ›wd in front of the Happy Home.

"This," said the prospector mournfully, as he lted at a turn of the road, and looked back down : street, "is a peaceful camp, I don't think! ıd I've been two years comin' to it, just because n a forgivin', peace-lovin' sort of a cuss, that's ad sick of always havin' trouble for a bunk ıte. Pshaw!"

CHAPTER VII

THE RED-HAIRED GIRL TO THE RESCUE

THE man who owned the corral told Lish that Bill thought he "was some punkins with his fists," and added that any man who got the best of Bill would receive a vote of thanks from the peace-loving part of the camp, or a monument if he valiantly failed to subdue that strenuous disturber. The prospector, who was busily throwing off the hitches from his burros, smiled, but said nothing of his own battle with the camp ruffian. He doubted from the awed manner in which the corral-owner spoke of the redoubtable Bill whether he would accept any statement of conquest made by a man without bruises, scars, callouses, or teeth-marks to prove strife.

"I thought when I come here," sadly commented Lish, "that this Peaceful Hill was like what it's named."

"Oh, she's quiet enough," replied the corral man, lounging against the fence. "That is," he

added guardedly, "she's peaceable enough from four in the mornin' to four in the afternoon. You see, Big Bill and his gang goes to bed at four in the mornin', and sleeps until four P. M. After that this-here hill ain't so dadbinged quiet as she might be. She just naturally boils and bubbles, and howls and roars, the howlin' and roarin' gettin' good by midnight, and best by two o'clock in the mornin', then dyin' away into whispers as this here Bill and his crowd gets too sleepy or drunk to keep it up."

The prospector was pulling a tarpaulin over his packs where they rested beside the fence, and the corral man added ruminatingly: "There's only one person in this camp ever got the best of Bill. That was the Widder Callahan. She began with a rollin' pin, and ended with a brick and a beer bottle. They really hoped, for about three days, that she'd caved in Bill's top works; but there warn't no such luck."

"But what does he do for a livin'?" queried Henley.

"Him? Works a spell now and then. He's got a patch of placer ground somewhere, so they say, and him and the two or three that are his real pardners goes away and works it. All the rest that hangs around him does so because he's

right free with his money. This camp was all right till this gang came, and it looked as if when one came another drifted in, till bimeby there were a dozen, and there warn't no livin' with 'em."

Still the newcomer smiled thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, "I'm right glad I ain't got no trouble nor hard feelin's with any of 'em. If there's any one thing I hate above everything else, it's quarrelin'. That's all right for animals. They don't know no better. They're just the way the Lord Almighty made 'em; but with men it's different. I s'pose to-morrer, bein' Sunday, they'll keep quiet?"

"Quiet? Huh! They don't know nothin' about Sunday. Maybe you're alludin' to the meetin'-house. Well, it don't have no influence on 'em. 'Most always they makes it unpleasant for the meetin'. We only have 'em once a month now, since this gang came. They say the next time the circuit-rider comes up here in this part of the Sierras they're a-goin' to put an end to this church business. I dunno. Mebby they will."

"When does this circuit preacher come again?" asked Lish, with mild interest.

The corral-keeper stopped, and figured for a long time, making calculations on his fingers.

"That's to-morrer, too," he decided at last. "Now about fodder for them burros?" He dropped back into business again.

"All they can eat," was the prospector's reply. "And the best you got. They're friends of mine, specially that Jack. I've had him quite a spell; but Pete, the other one, I ain't got so well acquainted with. Only had him a month or two. He's a queer cuss, without any initiative and referendum — just sort of tags along, and I ain't had the heart to tell him to go about his business and hustle for himself. He seems so sort of helpless. Now, Jack there's got more individuality. Why, say! I'll bet he kicked me a hundred times the first year I had him. I sure do like that burro. If ever he gets a vote he'll be a Populist. Got ideas of his own, you see, and ain't scared to say so. Look at this now. Here, Jack! Come over here."

The burro, who had been rolling over and over to straighten the sweated hair, shook himself, cocked his ears forward, and advanced to his owner.

"I'm goin' now, Jack," said the prospector painstakingly, "and I'll be around to-morrer. Just keep peaceable, but kick the devil out of any one that goes near them packs. Give me a kiss."

The burro appeared to look at the packs from the corner of his eye, then lifted his soft gray nose up, and nuzzled the tanned face held toward him.

"See that?" called the prospector delightedly. "He knows. I heard him whisper: 'So long, David Elisha Henley. Keep sober.' It's been four year since I reformed, but he's always cautionin' me. When I was boozin', him and me used to fight like a bunch of wildcats. Now we're both peaceful."

He gave an affectionate hug to the burro's neck, walked over, and bestowed a pat on the other one, "Just so's his feelin's wouldn't be hurt," he explained, then leaped over the corral fence, and sauntered away toward the business street of the camp.

The camp seemed livelier now that the evening was drawing down, and the sun losing itself behind the high fringe of redwoods which bordered it on the west; but it was a quiet stir that did not belie the name of Peaceful Hill. A group of urchins played marbles in the middle of the street, and shouted, boy-like, at three smaller chaps who strove to emulate horses and driver by stirring up a cloud of dust with their dirty little bare feet and legs. Over on the grass in a vacant

lot a cluster of little girls holding hands filed beneath two others, and droned in shrill, childish unison: "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down, my fair lady!"

The prospector, with a sympathetic smile on his face, thrust his hands in his pockets, and watched them as the bridge came down, and the captured one was led away to whisper whether she would rather have a gold church or a gold bridge, to come back and join the side of her choice. He watched the gay tug of war, laughed aloud at the childish screams of delight when the side of the golden bridge won, and shook his head sadly.

"Lord!" he exclaimed to himself; "I'd like to play in that game, too; but I reckon they'd be scared of an old cuss like me."

For an instant it seemed that he would go over and ask permission to participate; and then, as if thinking better of it, he reluctantly continued his march. He reached the place where cinder paths beneath shade trees gave way to more pretentious board walks and straggling business buildings; now a grocery store, again a little butcher shop, a barber shop with a faded pole, and a saloon; a blacksmith shop with the smith inside singing in a loud, mellow voice, timing himself to the

creak and whine of his big leather bellows; another saloon which had pool tables in front, and then the stage office, and so on until he came to "Peaceful Hill Inn. Lodging for Man and Beast. Extra Special Rates for Meals by the Week." He went inside, but not without attracting attention from the men who lounged with chairs tilted against the rail on the little veranda that creaked and rattled when they moved.

"How much are rooms and grub?" he demanded of a man behind the desk, who was combing his oiled hair with due precision, in front of a small mirror. The man took another look to see if the line passed cleanly down the center, adjusted the two bangs on the sides of his forehead with mathematical exactness, then turned round.

"Get it fixed all right?" casually inquired the prospective guest, with a show of solicitude.

The clerk tried to look haughty, but was compelled to melt in the warmth of the friendly grin.

"Six bits for a room, and two bits a meal," he said, ignoring the question.

"If I'd know they was that cheap I'd brought Jack up here with me," declared the guest, accepting the proffered pen, and leaning over a register that had been furnished by some adver-

tising agency and showed signs of long wear. He inscribed his "David Elisha Henley" with much deliberation, and bestowing particular pains on the "curleycue" under the final "y." It was plain that he was quite proud of his signature.

"Go upstairs and bunk in the room clean down at the end of the hall," said the clerk, and the guest tramped upward and followed the directions, to find himself in a room with two windows looking out over a scene of sunset splendor, in which deep cañons, noble gorges, and royal forests spread away into profligate space.

"This Californy's the Lord's farm, I sort of think," he said to himself. "And this camp up here in the Sierras is just about right. I've been chasin' peace for two years, and, by the great horn spoon! I'm goin' to catch up with it and twist its tail till it bellers, right here!"

He washed the dust of the mountain roads from his face and bared torso with loud splutterings, and then sat by the window till the clangorous call of a cracked bell warned him that supper was served, after which he wandered down and fell into the current of men that led toward the dining-room. Already it was half-filled with men who were unmistakably miners. One table was filled with men who were apparently different,

and he shrewdly suspected them of being engineers, assayers, clerks, and bookkeepers.

A red-headed girl who chewed gum and carried prodigious trays laden with heavy crockery jerked her head toward him, and said: "You can set down here, mister, if you ain't got any other place."

He took the seat indicated by that jerk of the red head, and found himself back of the table devoted to the select. The girl came in and asked him in one rapid-fire sentence what he wanted, by saying: "Steakhamandeggsmuttonstewandhash," and he caught the last word in time to save disastrous inquiries by saying "Hash." Almost immediately she returned to him and fairly bombarded the table in front of him with a multitude of little dishes which thumped and rattled on the table with the rapidity of cards dealt by the hands of a professional gambler. He fell to eating with zest, but could not help overhearing the conversation at the next table.

"Yes, sir," one man said, "this here stranger just naturally started in on that Bill, and what he did do to him ain't down in no county history. Some says he kicked, bit, scratched, and yelled all at the same time, and he winds up by goin' over to the blacksmith shop and gettin' a four-

pound strikin' hammer to finish breakin' Bill's face in. Bill is sure a tame man for a week or two to come!"

There was a guffaw of laughter, which was interrupted by a warning hiss.

"Look out! Here comes some of his gang!" Lish heard an admonishing whisper, and looked up to see three or four men whose faces were familiar entering the dining-room.

He thought they must have been present at that afternoon set-to, but refrained from staring at them as they took seats and scowled around them. It did not dawn on him that they feared lest their prestige in Peaceful Hill had suffered through the ignominious and swift defeat of their renowned leader. Indeed, in his homely way, all he was thinking of at that moment was whether onions or garlic tasted better in hash, and how it compared with *chili con carne.* There was none in the room with a greater appetite than his and none who enjoyed his meal more, for he had not halted for lunch in the day's climb over the rugged mountain roads to his goal of happiness.

One after another the other diners departed, some of those at the select table politely saying, "Good-night, Maggie," to the red-haired girl, who, now that the rush was over, began to show

signs of content, and no longer wiped streams of perspiration from her face with a dish towel. Lish was still alone, and still eating industriously. He had finished two " helpings " of everything in the bill of fare, including dessert, and was now calmly eating the last of the bread in sight. Maggie approached him.

" Are you the man that gave Big Bill his needin's? " she asked, with blunt directness.

Lish looked up at her with the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes stretched a trifle, but losing none of their good humor.

" I don't know about that," he said. " You see, I'm a stranger here in this happy community. It seems to me I do recollect havin' a word or so with some feller that kicked Jack this afternoon. That's a wonderful burro, miss. He's right like a man. Speakin' of him reminds me one time of how he —"

" Rats on the burro! " she interrupted, with due elegance of expression. " What I'm asking about is, are you the feller that beat Big Bill's head? Because, if you are, I've got something to tell you."

The prospector saw that she was in desperate earnest. His face sobered.

" It seems to me I may be the feller."

"Then what I want to say is this: When I was waiting on his pals this evening, all they talked about was how they would get you. You've got a gun, ain't you?"

"Nope. Ain't carried one since I started up the Divide to this here Peaceful Hill. Thought I was done with guns forever, and throwed mine in the American River. And she was a good gun, too. Why, say! Once down back of San Bernardino, when a mountain lion jumped Jack, I—"

"Well, you ought to have kept it. This gang here is a bad one. It's been getting worse and worse for the last year. Nobody here likes to have trouble with them. What I wanted to tell you was this: They hang out mostly at the Happy Home saloon. There's a gambling lay-out in the back end of it, and they stick around there when they ain't out working. So it's best for you to keep away from that place. They'd pick a fight and kill you like a coyote, mister. You just keep away from there. Like some more of that pudding?"

Apparently the pudding outweighed fear, for he assented with an alacrity indicating a suspicion that she might repent and withdraw the proffer. When she returned with it she looked around the

room, as if to make certain that no one had entered in her absence, put the dish in front of him, and then laid something else down with a thump. He leaned back in his chair and looked at it. It was a big frontier Colt's pistol of heavy caliber, loaded, and beside it was a box of cartridges.

"You just slip that into your clothes," she said. "You might need it. I'm only lending it to you, and I want it back some time. It's a legacy."

He appeared more interested in the story of the legacy than in its visible form.

"Queer sort of a legacy," he said. "Whose was it?"

"Man I was going to marry. He was a shotgun messenger. Maybe you heard of him — Jim Ross. The hold-ups shot him because he showed fight. That was nearly two years ago. It's a good gun. Jim said so when he gave it to me. It was all he had — that is, that and thirteen dollars. And one of them was doby, but I didn't mind."

Lish took the gun quite reverently in his hands, "hefted" it to see how it balanced, and then, as if to humor her, slipped it into his coat pocket, where it hung, dragging that unoffending garment down by its weight.

"I've always had a sneakin' admiration for a man that gets the worst of it when he's doin' his

best," he said sympathetically. "I reckon it's because I'm so different. I reckon it's because I'm so peaceful that I hate to fight. 'Most always I get out of it. Now, if I'd been this Jim Ross, my arms would be six inches longer right this minute, because I'd have stretched 'em so hard when they told me to stick 'em up. Thanks for the loan of the gun, miss, just the same. And, by Jimminy, that puddin' was good!"

He got up and sauntered out of the dining-room with his hand in his pocket to support the weight therein, and made his way through the office and out to the porch, where the loafers were congregated in much the same attitude as when first he saw them. The moon had not risen, although it threatened to appear from behind the high peaks to the eastward, and the camp shrilled with life. There was scarcely a store or a saloon that did not have in front of it some laughing, talking group, some of whose members were shown in the rays of yellow light coming through windows where huge coal-oil lamps exposed displays intended to be seductive. Lish would have seated himself contentedly on the edge of the porch, but, even as he was contemplating that action, heard one man behind him address another:

"That's him! That feller over there by the

center post. He's the man that cooked Big Bill's goose."

"I wouldn't be in his boots for five thousand dollars!" was the emphatic rejoinder, still in a low voice. "First, when Bill gets able it won't be a fist affair. Second, if he gets the best of Bill, there'll be about three or four others that'll take a try at him. Before he's through he'll have to clean the crowd out, or they'll clean him."

Lish looked thoughtfully down the street, but did not betray by his attitude that he had heard, or that he noted the increasing silence and lowering of voices as others recognized him. A distinct wave of embarrassment swept over him, and he half-fled into the seclusion of the middle of the road.

"Somehow," he said to himself, "I'm sort of sorry I came here. It looks as if this camp was gettin' along all right till I showed up. Anyhow, they must have been satisfied, or they'd have got busy and run this Big Bill and his gang out. I reckon I'll hit off toward Canady Hill to-morrer. It might be healthier for a peaceful man like I am. Then Bill and that bunch of sheep-herders'll forget all about me, and bimeby I can come down here without anybody botherin' me."

He started aimlessly toward the corral out at

the edge of the town. The moon came up, and he looked backward. It shone on the rows of trees by the sides of the street, and dimmed the lights from the windows. It picked up the white, squatty spire of the church.

"Nope," he said to himself again, with a new determination, "I'm not goin' till Monday! I ain't been to church since I was a kid, and I'm goin' to start in again. I'm achin' to howl a few hymns when the preacher says: 'Everbody can cut loose.' I came here to soak in peace, and that's part of the game."

He made his way to the corral, and leaned on the fence and spoke to Jack, who came slowly over and held out his nose. He put his hand in his pocket, and brought out a chew of tobacco, which he handed that intelligent beast, who accepted it eagerly, and was about to bid him good-night when a shadowy form came out from behind the barn. It was the corral-keeper.

"That you, mister?" he asked. "I sort of reckoned it was. I'm glad you came over. I wanted to tell you, since I found out you was the man who went after Big Bill, that you'd best steer clear of the Happy Home. Some of that bunch is tellin' what they'll do to you if you come in there."

" It does seem to me," said Lish, " that everywhere I go all I hear about is this man Bill, and what he's goin' to do to me. Now, see here, mister, I'll tell you somethin'. He won't do nothin'; because he can't catch me! I never was a hand to look for a fight, and I ain't lookin' for one now, and I'm plumb scared stiff. I see just what you mean. I agree with you. If it was Bill alone, I might take a chance, because the Bible says a soft answer turneth away wrath, and the answer he'd get from me would be softer'n a spoiled clam. So I hope you won't worry none about me whatsoever, because I'll sure run unless my knees is rattlin' so I can't."

He even turned back after he had bade the man good-night to reassure him that he would take care of himself because he " was scared into an ague "; but the strange part of it was that after he had gone some distance down the street he went over into the moonlit shadow cast by one of the huge trees, ejected all the shells from the big pistol, and tested the action with a certain air of knowing familiarity. Then he struck a match and inspected the cartridges, after which he put in fresh ones and slipped the old ones into the box. And then, to show how fearful he was, he passed leisurely on down the street.

It was just one o'clock in the morning when the Happy Home was at its liveliest, that a hush fell upon it, caused by the entrance of a man with broad, sloping shoulders and queer legs. The man walked in unconcernedly, stood sidewise to the bar, and said to Mr. Holliday: "I'd like some sody pop, the red kind, sarsaparilly if you got it, rosberry second choice, but as you ain't got them, give me lemonade."

Holliday looked anxiously toward the rear of the room, and began to force himself to haste in the preparation of the drink. Whispered comments were floating down the room, and warning admonitions. Four or five men, apprehensive of trouble, began slipping rapidly toward the door to escape. Some of them may have observed a singular bulge under the prospector's armpit, a certain sign that he was not unprepared.

He backed against the wall at the end of the bar, and lifted his glass of lemonade with a hand so deliberate, so unwavering, so steady, that it appeared to boast of his nerves. He drank the decoction slowly, taking his time for the operation, and looking with half-humorous eyes over those at the lower end of the room. He did not seem to notice that the games had stopped, and that the dealers were looking anxiously toward him, that

some of the players had got to their feet and edged toward the sides of the room, and that the only men seated were those that had been loudest in their approval of Big Bill in the afternoon's encounter.

He paid for his drink with a whimsical, slow smile, pocketed his change, and then bestowed a calm, sneering, chilling grin on the members of Big Bill's gang at the end of the room, a mocking "Good-night, gents!" and in an instant had sidestepped through the door and disappeared.

Behind him there was a sigh of relief, some sarcastic comment, and the peaceful pursuits of the Happy Home resumed; but apparently the cause of it all was equally at peace, for, as he blew out the flame of his lamp in the Peaceful Hill Inn, he still smiled to himself, and said, addressing the open window: "I've been lookin' for peace for a long time, and this camp is all right! It suits me to a T-Y-ty. I sort of think I'll stay here quite a while."

CHAPTER VIII

KEEPING THE PEACE WITH A DOUBLE-ACTION GUN

THE prospector sallied down to the hotel office quite late Sunday morning. He smiled pleasantly at everyone in sight, threw away the butt of a brown-paper cigarette, and told the clerk he had heard no church bell.

"I sort of been wantin' to hear church bells," he said, "for several years. When I saw that meetin'-house yesterday I was so tickled I mentioned it to my burro. 'To-morrer mornin',' says I, 'just when I'm wantin' to sleep my darndest, there'll be a bell wakin' me up. Then probably I'll cuss some. The bell will keep janglin' away, and I can't sleep. Then I'll set up in bed and say: "Hang that bell!" Then I'll get up and wash my face, and say: "I'm going to church, I am! Ain't been to one in twenty year."' That's what I said; but there wa'n't no bell."

The clerk refused to appreciate his sentiments.

Instead he stared at him for a moment, and began: "Big Bill is—"

"Never mind him!" growled Lish. "I'm sort of tired of that name. How about the bell? Ain't there a bell?"

The clerk admitted that there was not, and that the reason was the poverty of the diminutive flock that attended divine service. Furthermore, as he understood it from hearsay, seven church fairs, two sociables, and a cantata had left the bell pot ten or fifteen dollars shy. Lish listened with a melancholy look of disappointment, and appeared thoughtful when he turned away toward the dining-room, where he was the last arrival, entering just as a horse barely "scrapes under the wire," when Maggie, the red-haired waitress, was beginning to close the doors.

"Thought you were never coming!" she snapped at him, with an assumption of anger; but he mollified her, disarmed her, cajoled her by his wondrous smile.

"I'd of been here before," he said, "only I was upstairs tryin' to shine my boots for meetin'. Besides that, I cleaned your gun. I'm wearin' it right here next to my heart now, just to show you how much I appreciate it."

He pulled his coat to one side, exposing a home-

made holster, fashioned clumsily from an old bootleg.

"I don't expect to have to use it," he said, "because I always run rather than fight; but I'll keep on wearin' it for a while just because you loaned it to me, and because as far as I can judge that feller Ross, what gave it to you, was not a bad sort, but jest foolish. By the way, Miss Maggie," he asked, with due deference, "do you ever attend Sunday meetin's?"

"I do if the regular boarders ain't so all-fired lazy they keep me here in the dining-room until it's too late," she snapped back; but he was too philosophical to answer an angry woman. It is to his credit that he ate in haste.

"I've gobbled my chuck," he said, in further endeavor to win approbation, "so's that you could go to meetin' this mornin'. I'm goin', Miss Maggie, and I hope to see you there. It's good for a person — just like sulphur and molasses in the springtime. Sort of cleans out their systems, and gets 'em started right for another week. I'll carry that gun, all right. Hope you'll be there, because the last time I went to a church house there wa'n't a person inside the door that I didn't know by name, and I want to feel at home again. So long."

He hurried out of the hotel and off up the street to pay his morning visit to his two burros, and while there busied himself with his packs. Apparently it took him some time to find what he wanted, but at last he appeared with it. It was a celluloid collar and a faded blue necktie, with a poker chip cut into a scarf ring. After that came a shirt of many colors and some horn cuff buttons, all of which he slipped into his pockets with an air of abashment.

He talked to Jack, who stood behind him during this process, now and then thrusting a warm gray muzzle against the back of his neck, or taking tentative nips at his garments. Once or twice Lish made a pretense of furious anger at this familiarity, and struck at the burro as if intent on knocking him down; but apparently the animal was used to these outbursts, for all he did was to run away a few feet, kick the air with both heels, and then slip slyly back to the teasing caress.

"It's a good thing it's Sunday, you long-eared chump!" the prospector remarked, shaking his fist in the burro's face. "Because if it wasn't I'd give you the worst lickin' you ever had in your born days."

But the little burro only smiled at him knowingly, as he climbed the fence, and hastened away

o the hotel to make the necessary additions to his apparel. He leaned over the desk, and whispered to the clerk in a hoarse undertone.

"What time do they hold meetin's?" he asked. "It's been so long since I went to one that I forget."

"Eleven," was the concise answer.

He looked at the clock, and consulted a huge silver watch that was lashed to his belt with a worn and greasy leather thong. "Gosh! I got to hurry!" he ejaculated, and went up the stairs three steps at a time. He reappeared with a decidedly solemn, yet expectant expression of face, and trudged away toward the little white building that he had passed the day before.

As he approached he heard the sound of childish voices singing "Precious Jewels," and he almost ran to the door. He paused as he gained it.

"That," he said to himself, "must be the Sunday school, and it looks to me, from the general run of the lay-out, that it comes before the regular meetin' for grown-ups, and that I'd be buttin' in if I went in there now; but, by Jimminy, it sounds good! This camp's all right! Maybe, if I had more education, I could be a teacher in that mess. I reckon maw would be some surprised if she was

alive and knew how I'm standin' here, just naturally itchin' like a dog with mange, to get into that Sunday-school mess with both feet!"

There may have been more embarrassed men than David Elisha Henley as he stood there by the door when the preliminary services ended; but if so they were not in that camp. Churchgoers began to arrive, but still he stood there, leaning against the corner of the building, watching them, and envying them their air of habitude and repose. Most of them were women, and now and then a man, elderly, arrived and entered. It was the red-haired waitress who saved him the ignominy of weakening and incontinently bolting back to the Happy Home or some other resort, where he would have been at ease.

"Hello!" she exclaimed, as she came striding up to the little building. "What are you hanging around out there for?"

"B-b-because I ain't got guts enough to go in!" he exploded. "But, by gee whiz, I'll go in now that you're here."

"Well, get a move on you, then," she retorted, "and don't walk as if you'd just robbed a henroost. You ain't afraid, are you?"

He had come closer to her. From inside, a cottage organ began a weird sort of wail under

the hands of someone whose musical education had been developed along strength of legs rather than hands. At her gibe he straightened a little, although his words belied him:

"Course I'm afraid! You'd be scared, too, if you hadn't been to a meetin' in more'n twenty year; but I'm goin' to see it through. It don't hurt a man none to go to church."

She started and walked inside the little chapel, and he persisted, to her annoyance, in walking so closely to her that he almost stepped on her heels. She held her head very high, and blushed the fiery red that only red-headed women are capable of blushing, while he doggedly followed her as if for protection, or guidance, across a strange waste. She sidled into a bench, and he clumsily insisted on sliding in after her.

"Well, here we are!" he exclaimed, in a friendly spirit; but his remark was ill-timed, for just as he began speaking the music stopped, and his mumble, intended for a whisper, became an audible roar. Some one tittered, and he scowled fiercely around him, and then back at Maggie, who was endeavoring to appear unconcerned, and a stranger to him.

He resisted a desire to tug at the sleeve of her shirt-waist and apologize. He sought refuge in

a copy of Gospel Hymns lying on the bench beside him, and wet his thumb to turn the leaves. He heard nothing of the text, and was relieved when another hymn was announced. The circuit-rider read the first verse aloud, and Lish could scarcely suppress a shout of exultation.

"I know that!" he exclaimed, in a stage whisper to the waitress. She did not heed him, and he thought he had spoken too low. "I know that there hymn," he repeated, "and say! It's a whale of a good song! I'm for it! I could almost remember every word. My mammy used to sing it to me when I was a kid. Say, you ain't deef, are you?"

She turned toward him with a red face and an annoyed gesture, but at sight of his excited eyes relented.

"S-s-sh! Don't whisper so loudly," she admonished. "Everybody here can hear you."

For a moment he settled back into his seat, and shriveled, and dwarfed, and felt that a score of eyes were gimleting him through the back. The organ started, and one whole verse had been sung before he could forget his breach of etiquette; then, losing himself, he cleared his throat with a harsh, scraping noise, and leaned out into the second verse. What he lacked in training and

finish he made up for in vigor and willingness. He sang enthusiastically, as he had sung to steers on the ranges at night, when his soul was filled with poetry. There was fervor in his attempt to take high notes. There was zest in his efforts to roar out the low ones. He was unaware that the hard-worked little circuit-rider, ranked in the church records as "Home Missionary," shook and shuddered at those first bellows of his, as if in apprehension; then, watching him closely, smiled with relief, convinced of a great and overflowing sincerity.

Lish was sorry that there was to be no more singing. He felt that in this field he was a success. He was proud of himself, although Maggie, the waitress, sat stiffly and stared straight ahead at the conclusion of the hymn. Lish edged toward her a little, and she edged away. He was sorry, for he wanted company, and that two or three feet of intervening space seemed a vast distance. The preacher folded his hands before him on the pulpit, and memory admonished Lish that this was the sign for prayer. He looked quickly to right and left, wondering what posture the service demanded — kneeling, standing, or merely a respectful bending of the head. He decided the latter was the safe course,

and was further embarrassed when he discovered that the custom was to kneel. He almost lost his nerve, and decided that he had best retain his own attitude of respect.

The preacher was not a strong man in physique or voice. His tones were those of appeal, low pitched and fraught with earnestness, as he began to plead forgiveness for those who blindly hindered the greatest work of all in the little camp up there in the tops of the hills. A cricket chirped loudly outside, rendering his voice discordant. The humming of honey-laden bees, busy, irreverent, and ignorant of the Sabbath, floated in through a window, and lent a monotone of sound. The air was drowsy with the fragrant scent of wild roses, of pennyroyal, and golden-rod. And then, jarring and discordant, voices wafted in from the street — quarrelsome, drunken, jeering voices:

"At it again, is he? The sky pilot! Let's all go to church. Hooray! He's the mutt that tried to make this a closed camp. Let's close his meetin'-house!"

There was a confusion of oaths, coarse remarks, ribald comments, and clumsy humor. The little preacher, in an agony of suspense and haste, concluded his prayer just as five or six men darkened the sunlight streaming through the door.

He was not the first to open his eyes and look at the intruders, for already the man who was afraid had pivoted on his haunches, and frowned at the interlopers. Lish grinned joyously; but there was that queer, set look on his face.

As the preacher turned tremulously, feeling that he was alone in the forthcoming combat, to his opened Bible, the prospector arose in his seat with a sudden determination. He stepped out into the aisle, walked straight toward the preacher, stepped up on the raised platform, and stood beside him. The preacher stopped in amazement. He backed away from the pulpit as the prospector advanced, and his words subsided. He scarcely knew what to expect, and though fearless, as befits men of the cloth, waited for the newcomer to make his announcement. It was sharp and to the point.

"I don't want," Lish said, in his calm drawl, "to scare no one, or to say nothin' that ain't befittin' a house of worship; but—" He paused, and thrust a swift hand inside his bulging coat, and drew forth the heavy Colt's pistol that had been bequeathed by a man unafraid. He laid it on the Bible, and then, as if by afterthought, removed it and laid it alongside.

"But, as I was sayin', if there is them here as

come searchin' for trouble, they're sure to find it. I'm a right-peaceable man. Nobody can ever say I did him a wrong unless he tells a lie. There ain't no dead man as can say I sent him off unless he pulled first. This-here camp is called Peaceful Hill. This-here meetin'-house is peaceful. It's goin' to stay that way if I have to kill three or four men to make it so."

He made an impressive pause, in which he glared down at the disturbers standing awkwardly by the door, and his hand slipped forward to the butt of the gun. It seemed to clutch and hang there, as if to something familiar. The muzzle lifted slightly from the pulpit, and as if by chance fell into line with the surprised members of Big Bill's gang.

" I'm right sure," the calm voice went on, " that there is seats for everybody here. Any of those that got here late will now have a chance to get them before the meetin' goes ahead, and I would feel right hurt if anybody started for the door. I'd hate to have my peaceful feelin's disturbed and mixed up here to-day. Would the brothers back there who haven't found seats come right close up the front — say in the front row? We want to have 'em where we can see 'em."

There was an instant's suspense. The hum of

the bees from outside seemed louder, the vagrant scent of flowers stronger. Big Bill's friends shifted on their feet.

"You come up here, and be damned quick about it!" suddenly crashed out the voice of the prospector, and, swift as light, the gun was elevated into a menacing line, prepared for deadly action. They dared hesitate no longer. One started to escape by the door, but was halted by a single sharp word: "Stop!" He faltered, and came forward, with his companions, who, frowning, awed, dominated by the man at the pulpit, slouched forward and filed into the front bench.

"Take off your hats!" was the next command, as the gun appeared to cover them all. They obeyed.

For an instant the man of peace looked at them, with an amused, unrelenting sneer on his face, and then, without lowering the gun, but in an altered voice, he spoke to the preacher.

"Parson," he said, "I'm right ashamed of comin' up here and disturbin' you this way. But I got rattled. I thought maybe there was some that had come here to kick up a fuss in the one place that every decent man respects, a church. I see I was mistaken. However, bein' as I'm up here, if you don't mind, I'll just stay here.

I'll sit down, and you'll excuse me and go right ahead with the preachin'."

He backed away until he felt the legs of a horsehair chair touching the backs of his knees, and then deliberately settled into the seat; but the gun did not waver, and, strangely enough, it had shifted until it bade fair to rake the front bench if a nervous finger happened to press too hard. He smiled benignly from his lips, but his eyes were still fixed and determined.

For an instant the preacher wavered, and threatened to expostulate; but a look at the homely face, that had become set as adamant, convinced him that any appeal or remonstrance would prove futile, and so he stepped to the Bible and spoke. His voice took strength as his discourse proceeded, and the awed and frightened hush of the congregation relaxed. There were but few in the audience who did not hear him, yet their eyes would wander to that still figure seated on the horsehair chair, clad in rough clothing faded to a nondescript hue by time, wind, and sun, with the blue necktie and poker-chip ring, and the shirt that appeared painfully stiff where it bulged from beneath the celluloid collar.

Had that figure been hewn from granite it could not have been more immobile. Nothing about it

shifted or betrayed life save the cold, alert eyes that flashed contemptuous appraisements at the ruffians seated on the front bench. They dared not move. Once one of them at the far end shifted his position ever so slightly, and instantly the gun swung in his direction, and to his horror he saw that it was a double-action pistol, and that the hammer moved up and down by a fraction of an inch, as if the finger beneath it were aching to signal death. They got stiff and cramped in their anxiety to sit motionless. They breathed with difficulty, half filling their lungs, lest by too much inflation they arouse the prospector's suspicions and bring on a climax. The time seemed endless, and the strain on the increase. They began to wonder if they could remain quiet much longer. One or two of them paled, and felt drops of cold sweat on their foreheads, as imagination led them to fear that the strange character watching them might, in the end, prove remorseless. There was everything in his appearance to indicate that he would kill with swift precision. Even the lines of good humor around his eyes had subtly and essentially changed to malicious maps indicative of murder.

The preacher felt the tensity of the situation, and at last heard his voice beginning to break.

He hastily closed his discourse when scarcely more than half-through.

"The congregation will please stand for the closing prayer," he said.

But again the cold voice broke out behind him, in dictatorial terms: "All but them on the front bench. They will hold their hands above their heads and kneel. And be mighty quick about it, too!"

So cowed were the members of Big Bill's gang by that long wait, they thankfully accepted this as an opportunity to stretch their cramped limbs, and obeyed.

"Go ahead, parson," the prospector commanded. "The Lord'll understand I ain't showin' any disrespect if I just keep right where I am."

The prayer was finished and the congregation seated before he bade his captives resume their seats. He heard the hymn given out, and again his heart jumped sadly at the knowledge that it, too, was familiar after all those years. To the surprise of those in the church, he sang it, loudly and earnestly; but in all that time his eyes remained fixed and sweeping over those below. He did not permit his men to stand up during the benediction, and whispered to the preacher to

please ask every one to leave the church immediately after. The congregation hastened out, glad to be free from that exciting service, all save the preacher himself, who stood as if bewildered.

"Now I'll preach a little," declared the prospector, suddenly standing up and stepping to the edge of the platform. "You Piutes came up outside here when the parson was prayin', and you reckoned you'd bust up this meetin'. I heard you. I'm for peace, so I didn't stand for it. They ain't nobody hates a fuss worse'n I do, and they ain't nobody'll fight harder to keep from havin' one. Me and the parson were right glad to have you attend our services. We'll be here every Sunday after this, him and me both. And me and him aims to make this meetin'-house the most peaceful place on all the Big Divide. It may take a graveyard to do it, but if it comes to a show-down we'll furnish that, too. First come, first served. You can go now, brethren, in single file, each with his hands over his head till he gets outside the meetin'-house lot and down to the corner of the next street. I'll go part way with you, and they say I'm long-sighted. Glad you attended services with me and the parson. Come again, boys! Come again! Always welcome. Now hike!"

He kept his word, for he herded them carefully out into the road, and stood and watched them as they broke and ran at the corner like a lot of excited sheep, swearing loudly, and shouting back to him that their turn would come; but it did not seem to do more than restore his good humor. He turned to the preacher behind him, and held out his hand.

" Parson," he said, " I'm sure sorry not to have been able to pay more attention to that talk you made; but I was just scared stiff for fear they'd start somethin', and I'm a peaceful sort of a cuss, and always have been. But you see the facts are that I was totin' that gun just by accident. It was nothin' but what you call sentiment that made me have it with me. And the worst of it was that it wa'n't loaded at all, because I pulled the cartridges last night. Good-mornin', glad to have met you. I'll come again, because there ain't no place so calm and comfortin' as a nice, clean church."

CHAPTER IX

AT CANADA HILL MINE

BRIGHT and early on the following morning he was gone. The hotel clerk found the price of his entertainment pinned to the register, and Maggie, entering the dining-room at five o'clock, found a note painfully addressed to "Miss Maggie," and something after it scratched out, that she deciphered as an "Esq.," which he had corrected by erasure. She flushed a little over her strong, healthy, homely face as she tore it open and read it through. She stood with it in her hand, and stared for a long time out through the window at the growing morning. It seemed to be an astonishing document, for she repeated, several times, under her breath: "Well, for goodness' sake! My land! Just to think!" Then she looked around the tawdry, rough room, where the odor of past meals clung like ghostly reminders of stale food, and abruptly slipped the note into the bosom of her dress. And the flush on her face suddenly

deepened as her capable hands began their morning's task. This was the note:

DEAR MISS MAGGIE: Im hikin, going to canady hill mine. I got your gun yet rite next my heart. going to keep it a while till I get one because that big bill gang has got me plum buffaloed. I aint exactly runnin away from them but I'm a feller that aint goin out lookin for skunks in my sundaygo to meetin clothes. its never been my plan to tote limburger cheese in my pockets in hot weather, because I hate a fuss. when it blows over a little so they'll forget me Ill come back. the rose is red, the violets blue. the pinks is sweet and so air you.

DAVID ELISHA HENLEY.

If the prospector's statement that he was running away from trouble were true, he showed fear in a remarkable way; for out on the road he followed, as the sun came up and threw long shadows between the great trees bordering it, he sang, in a roaring voice: "Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all!" priding himself on the turns he made in the phrasing of "royal diadem." Sometimes he stopped singing to hold short discussions with Jack, who failed to attend to business with his usual industry, and once, to the distinct disapproval of the elder burro, bolted the road in quest of something that looked like a thistle. The prospector led him back by the ear, stood him in the road, and shook his fist in the mouse-colored face.

"For the Lord's sake, Jack," he protested, "let's you and me not quarrel! Ain't I had trouble enough since we landed at this Peaceful Hill? If I lose my temper and take a club to you, they won't be nothin' but little pieces of mule splattered all over this hillside. Come on!"

It was singular that the man who could instill fear into disturbers of the Big Bill type failed in the least to terrify a mere burro; but the evidence was patent, for the animal, after staring at him from wise eyes thatched over with hair, suddenly stuck his nose up, and with his lips nipped the prospector's nose, which action seemed to mollify that gentleman's anger, for his eyes twinkled with good-natured affection, and he resumed his way, singing.

At the top of a particularly steep climb, where the burros panted heavily, he paused to rest. As if interested in the gun he carried, he took it out and gave it an examination.

"Can't say as I like these double actions," he explained to the pack animals. "They're all right, I reckon, if you understand 'em; but give me a fan trigger for real work!"

He fished some cartridges from his pocket, loaded the gun, and looked around for a mark. A staid old redwood up the road caught his eye.

He fumbled in his pocket, and took out a card, and smiled as he looked at it. On one side was printed the legend of the "Happy Home." On the other was a scrawl in lead pencil, illiterate and difficult, which read:

You take a tip from a friend and look a little out or that big bill gang will sure get you as soon as he gets abel to move aroun you didnt orter did what you done down at the meetin coz it made them soar dont cum nigh my place. Holliday.

He read it over again.

"That was right good of that feller to slip this under my door last night," he ruminated. "I s'pose he did it when he got through work. Must live there at the hotel. Maybe he give it to Maggie!"

He straightened up, walked to the redwood, fastened the card with pegs, and walked back to a long, fair range. He then looked at it attentively, as though to fix its location in his memory, turned his back, whirled, and on the instant fired, not one shot, but as rapidly as he could pull the trigger, until the echoes of the shots blended into one. He grinned with satisfaction, and balanced the pistol in his hand.

"You're sure some gun, you are," he said approvingly. "You'll do! These double actions ain't so slow, after all."

He walked down to the tree, and inspected it. In the center of the little card was one hole that could have been covered with a ten-cent piece. He was ejecting the shells from the pistol when a voice hailed him from the road:

"Hello! Is it safe for a man to go ahead now?"

He turned to face Martin, saying as he did so that he "guessed the road was free."

Martin was sitting sidewise in his saddle, half-standing in a stirrup, and with his other foot dangling idly over the saddle. His keen eyes appraised the prospector, who walked slowly toward him, replacing the pistol in its holster as he did so.

"You seem to be able to shoot some," the mine-owner volunteered.

"Used to," was the laconic response, after which he stood waiting for Martin's next words, as if caring neither one way nor the other for the continuance of the conversation.

The mine-owner at least appeared friendly. At last he dropped heavily to the ground, threw his horse's reins over its head, and fumbled in his pocket. He took out some brown papers, and asked: "Got any tobacco? I've lost my pouch somewhere."

At this open sign of amity the prospector relaxed.

"Sure! Help yourself!" He tossed a sack of tobacco which Martin deftly caught.

"I didn't know but what there was a gun play taking place up here," the mine-owner said, as he rolled a cigarette. "I slowed up till I could make sure. I'm glad to see you, Henley. I wanted to have a talk with you. I don't go to church much, but my wife still follows her training. She told me what you did yesterday."

"So?" grinned Lish, and then, with a wave of embarrassment: "I hated to have to do it, but they sort of r'iled me. I'm a right-quiet sort of chap, who don't like fights and squabbles. I always steer clear. Besides, I hadn't been to church in so long I wanted to hear that little man preach. They interrupted. Somebody had to stop 'em."

"And you did it to a finish, I should say," added the mine-owner, laughing. Then his face sobered: "See here, Henley, what are you doing?"

"Prospectin'."

"It's none of my business, but who are you, anyway?"

"Prospector."

The mine-owner studied him for an instant with a frank scrutiny, and seemed to come to a decision.

"I can use a man like you," he said. "I need one. I want someone who can be depended on in a pinch — some man who isn't afraid."

Lish burst into a long-drawn chuckle of amusement.

"Need a man like me? Sorry, but I can't see it, if you're meanin' take a job. I'm no good workin' for other men, because for two reasons. I'm lazy and I'm onreliable. Besides, I don't like to work for no man. There ain't anyone can say he's my boss. I'm my own. Again, mister, you've got me sized up dead wrong, because I've got just the same kind of nerve as a mouse. The only way anybody can get a fight out of him is to get him by the tail, and then he bites. Besides, I ain't busted. I never work real hard for David Elisha Henley till I'm flat broke. Most days I like to lay around on my back under the trees, and watch the squirrels and chipmunks and birds. I'm one of the kind of men that are no good for anybody except themselves, and I s'pose I'm the most selfish cuss the Lord ever turned loose in a right-liberal world. Nope! They ain't no man can hire me; but I'm much obliged,

all the same, because one of the most flatterin' things a man can do is to offer a job."

Martin looked at him a moment with a curious expression, and then remounted his horse.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Up to Canady Hill. After that — be hanged if I know!"

"What are you looking for — placer ground?"

"Anything that's got pay in it."

Again Martin looked thoughtful for a few seconds, and then gathered his reins.

"Well," he said, "I must be moving. If things don't break right for you, come over to the Cricket. Ask for Martin, the owner. I can always find a place for you. So long."

Lish returned the salutation, and stood and watched him from sight.

"Now, there," he said, "goes a feller I could like. And if it ever comes my way to do him a good turn, I'll sure do it. Come on, Jack."

They resumed their march with the same carelessness that they had begun it, as if they had nowhere in particular to go and plenty of time to get there. So slow was their progress, and so filled with diversions, such as the fluttering of an unknown bird, a peculiar-colored piece of rock, or a strange flower, that it was four o'clock in

the afternoon by the time they swung around a spur of the mountain, looked down, and saw the Canada Hill Mine below them. The roar of its stamps assaulted the echoes, thin white smoke curled from the mill stack, and the clash of a car of waste being dumped crashed upward.

Lish expressed great interest in it, and moved at a little brisker pace as he approached. The clang of hammer on steel came to him as a directing point, and he made his way to the little shop where a smith was tempering some drills. The man looked up and nodded.

"I reckon this is the Canady Hill?" Lish asked.

"You reckon right," was the answer, as the smith turned and thrust the drill into a tub of water, and then jerked it out again lest it temper too hard.

"Is there a woman workin' here by the name of Mrs. Marthy Higgins?" the prospector asked.

"Sure! Cook. Best cook on the Divide, I say. Want to see her?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, go down to the mess-house." The smith walked out, holding the drill in one hand and his hammer in the other, lifted the bar of steel as if it were a straw to be used as a

pointer, and directed Lish: "Go right down there — that third small buildin'. Go around to the other end of it. Can't make any mistake. She's the only woman in the camp, and she's a lady, Mrs. Higgins is."

Lish wondered if this last were an admonition, but decided, from the looks of the smith's face, that there was no offense intended, so thanked him, and stepped away over the worn trail. He looked in through the mess-house windows, and saw that already the long table had been prepared for the evening meal, its heavy plates, heavy cups and saucers, and steel implements all laid out in mathematical precision on a figured oilcloth that shone resplendent. He decided that the camp cook was neat and orderly. Turning the end of the building, he heard a querulous old voice that quavered along ecstatically.

"I like cloves in them apple pies, Marthy. It keeps a feller from believin' that the folks down East that dried them apples wa'n't any too particular about which ones they picked out."

Lish stopped in front of the door and looked in. He was compelled to look over the head of a man with an enormous mass of white whiskers and a bald head fringed with long locks, who was busy eating hot pie from a tin plate. He sur-

mised that this must be the man known as Channel Smith. Behind him, in the shadows of the kitchen, a thin, tired-looking little woman, neat to the point of primness, was busying herself at her work.

"Howdy, stranger?" croaked the man with the pie.

Lish looked at him sympathetically, and restrained a desire to smack his lips. The woman came toward him, wiping flour from her hands on a towel, and looked at him inquiringly. He addressed himself to her.

"You're Mrs. Marthy Higgins, ain't you?" he asked.

She came closer to the door, where the light shone on her, before she answered, and Lish sustained a sudden and overwhelming sense of awkwardness and abashment. All the speeches he had prepared slipped hurriedly from his memory, and he had to resort to subterfuge.

"They tell me as you are the cook here," he stammered, twisting his hat, which by an afterthought he had removed, "and I wanted to ask if I could stop here to-night if I paid for it."

The woman looked at his garb for a moment, and then laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll have to ask the superin-

tendent about that," she said. "You have come to the wrong place. But usually when anyone comes through he permits them to stop over night without pay."

"Sure we do," croaked Channel Smith. "You don't think we're Injuns here, do you? Where in tarnation were you dragged up? Looks like a minin' man, too! Have some pie?"

For an instant Lish, overwhelmed, wondered if Channel Smith was part owner of the Canada Hill Mine; but came to the conclusion, later proven true, that he had nothing whatever to do with it.

"I'd like a wedge of it if you can wait till I throw the packs off my burros," he said, still suffering from timidity.

"You can put them here in the wood-shed," Mrs. Higgins replied, turning back to her work.

The prospector was busying himself at this task when a red-faced, burly man, with clear, sharp eyes, appeared.

"I'm Murdock, the supe here," he said. "Mrs. Higgins says you want to stay all night. You're welcome, being as you look like a white man. If you want to, you will find an extra bunk or two up there in the bunk-house to throw your blankets in."

Lish turned to thank him, but already he had swung around, and was trudging toward the waste dump. The prospector knew the kind, and went ahead with his task. He returned to the kitchen, and found a stool. The cook, smiling, handed him the coveted pastry.

"Come far?" asked Channel Smith.

"Yes. Keswick."

"The devil owns it," was the sententious retort. "Not that she ain't some minin' camp, from what they tells me, but they do say as how they're a tough lot to work with. Goin' to work here?"

"Nope."

"Then what did you come for?"

"Prospectin'."

The old man grunted, and continued to look at him. Something about Lish appeared to win his esteem.

"Are you any good?" he asked, with the same inquisitive frankness.

"I hope so."

The old man studied him a while longer, and appeared to warm more.

"Do you get lonesomelike?"

"Sometimes."

The old fellow slapped his hand on his knee, and chuckled.

"If you ain't got nowhere in particular to go," he said, "you can come up my way. I'm about two mile from here. If you come from Peaceful Hill you must 'a' passed right by the trail that cuts off to my place, but you couldn't have seen it. I've got a old channel up in there, sure's you're a foot high; but I ain't workin' it now because I'm kind of nosin' around a patch of ground that ought to have pay in it somewheres. Like to come? It makes an old feller like me feel better to have company somewhere nearer than two mile."

Lish hesitated, but confined his attentions to the pastry.

"I don't mean work for me, or go pardners, nor nothin' like that," Channel Smith went on; "but just look around there. There's a heap of likely ground up there that I think was overlooked."

"I'll think it over. Maybe I will," Lish said, and the old man gave him voluble directions as to how to get there. He then swung round sharply, and called: "Marthy! Oh, Marthy! Hurry and do up that pie for me, girl. I got to be goin' now."

The prospector was secretly amused at the air of proprietorship that the old man assumed, although he was to learn later that everyone around

the Canada Hill humored him in this, and that the superintendent frequently consulted him in a whimsical fashion, asserting that his judgment was so bad that he always asked his advice so he could take the opposite course.

Mrs. Higgins looked at Lish curiously after the old man made his departure, as if rather expecting him to go also; but for a long time he sat there and watched her in silence.

"I reckon you think I come here just to get somethin' to eat?" he ventured at last. And then, answering his own question, added: "I didn't. I come because I wanted to have a talk with you."

"Well, I'm here," she responded cheerfully, without in the least abating her work.

"It might take quite a while to say all I got to say, ma'am."

"If that's so," she said rather tartly, "you had better come around after dinner. The men will be in to their suppers in half an hour. I think you'd better wait till then."

He took the broad hint, and got up and walked away. He sauntered to the mess-house, where he was given a seat, and sat while the men filed in and ate quietly, as is the custom in mines, where men work hard, and eating is a serious business. He arose before the others had finished, nodded to

the superintendent, and made his way back to where the burros were eating the succulent grass of the hillside. He appeared to be nerving himself for the forthcoming interview, and, when he judged it was time to visit the cook, made his way to the back door. A Chinese boy was just finishing up the washing of the dishes, and Mrs. Higgins stepped outside and seated herself on a bench by the door.

"Mrs. Higgins, ma'am," he said, with his usual bluntness, "I know your husband, Bill Higgins, and I saw him a while ago."

The woman straightened suddenly on the bench, and bit her lip. Watching her, he saw that her face had grown a trifle whiter and more drawn.

"I thought maybe you'd like to know how he's gettin' along," he ventured further. "Most women do sort of have an interest in their menfolks."

"Did he send you to me?" she asked icily.

"No'm. Bill didn't know I was comin' this way."

She did not answer, but appeared to be straining her eyes off toward the sunset.

"Five year since he's set eyes on you, I think he said," he went on, as if ruminating.

"I think what he meant was that it has been

five years since I set eyes on him," she retorted, with a cold chill in her voice. "He made me to shift for myself. And now I'm glad of it."

The prospector appeared mightily interested in a chip which he shoved backward and forward across the bare ground with the toe of his boot.

"But he wrote you, and asked you if he could come back, he said. Says he to me: 'Lish, that Marthy was the finest woman that ever walked, and I didn't know it. I'm a-eatin' my heart out for her,' says Bill."

"He told you that, did he? The drunken loafer!"

"Oh, he's quit drinkin' for more'n two year, Bill has," he sturdily insisted. "He's workin' all the time, too. Good miner, Bill is, Mrs. Higgins. One of the best hard-rock men that ever spit a fuse. He's foreman up there now. Good job. I reckon he thinks a heap of you."

She sat like a statue for a moment, and then Lish saw that her fingers, toil-worn and hard, were twisting together as if she were in pain.

"I'm through with him," she said at last, but there was a slight quaver in her voice.

He watched her for an instant longer, and then grinned quietly to himself, and his eyes twinkled.

"His post-office address is Keswick," he said.

"Thought maybe you'd like to know if ev
want a divorce. I don't blame you none
true he don't drink no more, but he ain't r
but a big, nasty, ugly brute, that somebody
to shoot just on general principles. Why, n
I agrees with you! That Bill Higgins a
to live. He's a regular hellion, ma'am!"

That he was a queer diplomat was pro
the fact that in an instant she was on her fe

"Nobody asked you anything about him
said. "It's none of your business what
Drunk or sober, I expect he's as good as yo
It's queer how some men are always stickin
noses into other folks' affairs! I'm throug
Bill Higgins, and I don't care to see any m
you. Good-night!"

She turned and walked back into the k
door, and slammed the door shut after her.
prospector stood up on his feet, and walked
in the direction of the bunk-house, emitting a
soft: "Whew!" And, strangely enough
walked, he chuckled with an air of great
faction.

CHAPTER X

WHOSE CLAIM?

"SURE we can spare you a slab of bacon, and some flour, and any other little stuff you need," Murdock answered Lish the following morning, when asked for the opportunity to purchase those necessities; "but what I can't see is why you didn't get the stuff when you started from Peaceful."

Lish smiled at him with that frank air of an open-faced watch and said: "Well, you see, the fact is, I left right early."

"What is your name, by the way?" asked the superintendent.

"Henley. David Elisha Henley."

The superintendent leaned against the wall of the blacksmith shop and roared.

"Oh, you're the man that polished off Big Bill, then assisted at the services down in the camp, are you? One of the boys was down there and brought the story back."

The prospector shook his head dubiously. "I couldn't help it, you see," he drawled. "It does seem to me as if I'm the most unlucky man that ever walked. But about that bacon —"

"You can get anything you want at this mine! The little you'll need doesn't cost us anything for teaming. Mrs. Higgins runs the store-house for the grub. Here." He tore out a leaf from a memorandum book and gave him an order, which Lish took with a nod and walked away, calling back: "Thanks."

"And you don't need to pay for it now unless you wish," the superintendent shouted.

"All right," said Lish, without turning his head, as he made his way to the scene of his dismissal. But if anything rankled in his mind it did not show in his face as he stood for the second time at the kitchen door, and placidly said: "Good-mornin', Mrs. Marthy Higgins!"

She turned and looked at him. "I thought I told you that you needn't come around here any more!" she snapped, with a frowning stare at him.

"On business, ma'am," he said, and smiled amicably. "Just on business. The boss gave me this."

Reluctantly she took the paper from his hand

and read it. "All right. I suppose I'll have to give it to you. Come this way."

She led him out to a primitive store-house in the opening of what had evidently been a prospect drift in the hillside, unlocked the door with a key which she had brought from the kitchen, and said: "Well, what is it?"

Considering the small amount he took, Lish was evidently hard to satisfy, and kept up a running fire of what was meant to be polite conversation.

"Of course, up at Keswick," he said, "a feller can get anything he hankers for in the way of grub. Fresh vegetables up there, ma'am. You never saw anything like 'em! And fruit? Lawsee! Finest fruit I ever saw. Cheap, too. Guess it don't cost much to keep house up there. I says to a friend of mine: 'This is the place where every man orter have a wife to look after him. She'd be so all-fired happy trampin' around these fine stores and spendin' his money.'"

"Suppose you hurry up a little, will you?" she interrupted. "I haven't got all day to stay here."

He hurriedly pawed over some more of the supplies, and appeared quite oblivious to her speech.

"Of course, I ain't talkin' about the kind of men that drinks, or blows in all they make, ma'am.

That kind don't have nothin' to spend. I mean fellers that really have somethin', like Bill Higgins, your no-account husband, ma'am!"

"You can lock that door when you get through talking to yourself," he heard a voice outside, and, peering out, saw that she was hastening back to the kitchen. He grinned knowingly, and after that seized the first slab of bacon at hand, the first sack of flour, the first can of baking powder, and followed, with a solemn air of respect.

Her anger was so apparent when he told her the weight of the bacon and gave her the money in payment for the supplies, that he did not venture to say anything beyond an extremely polite "Good-day, Mrs. Higgins. Hope to see you again some time. I'll stick around here a while, I reckon, in this-here vicinity."

It was to Jack that he confided as he threw the pack over that beast's back, and made his preparations:

"Sorry to have to make you tote this stuff when I've already got bacon and flour enough to run a month; but this is deeplomacy, old pardner; hey, you!"

He gave a vicious shove with his knee into the burro's belly as Jack, with palpable effort, swelled and blew himself up until he threatened to become

a balloon and blow away. Jack gave a grunt, laid back his ears, pretended to bite, and snapped his teeth together with a sidewise twist that brought them within an inch of his owner's leg.

"Some day," said Lish plaintively, "you and me'll have the dag-gondest fight about that! I never saw a place yet that you didn't like well enough to try to stay there. Be good now before I knock seventeen kinds of cussedness out of your hide!"

He paused at the top of the hill, where the last view of Canada Hill Mine was losing itself, and smiled back at the mess-house.

"Good-by, Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he said, whimsically doffing his hat and sweeping it toward the ground. "Bill Higgins'll get you yet, if you don't watch out!"

He plodded his whistling, singing way over the two miles to the cut-off leading to the trail which Channel Smith called his own, and turned into it, on the general principle that the world was wide, and one place as good as another when it came to seeking gold. It was still early in the forenoon when he found the veteran's cabin, and gazed in amazement at the work which the patient, old plodder had done. There were trenches and crosscuts scattered over a shallow

valley, in the center of which meandered a swift-running stream, and the trees seemed to have made way for it and formed a phalanx to shelter the glade. He found Smith bending over, his back as round as a rainbow, in the latest trench, and watched the old man straighten painfully with hands on knees when hailed from the clay bank above. He was made certain of his welcome by the greeting.

"You see, it's right lonesome up here, evenin's," Channel said, in explanation. "So I'm sort of glad to have somebody for neighbor. A yaller dog would be better than nothin'."

He sat down on the edge, wiped the sweat from his brow and nose with his faded shirt sleeve, and prepared to be hospitable, although Lish scarcely knew whether to feel complimented.

"I patched up that cabin, there on the edge of the woods, nigh on to twenty year ago," Channel went on. "I always knowed there was somethin' in this gulch, and, by golly! I'll find her yet if I have to live to be two hundred year old!"

"Got any prospects?" queried Lish sympathetically.

The patriarch put a horny hand up to his mouth and mumbled into Lish's ear as if the whole world

were filled with rapacious ears, instead of there being no one nearer than two miles:

"Got one pan that run forty cents. Yes, sir, forty cents!"

The prospector was instantly interested to the point of excitement — that is, as far as it seemed possible for him to be excited.

"Never got no more," the old man went on; "but she's here some place. They ain't nobody put their stakes on that ground up there, that I know of. You can stake that, and you can bunk in my cabin, young feller! You couldn't want nothin' better'n that, could you?"

And Lish proved that he could not by beginning with this arrangement. In less than a week he discovered, by painful experience, that the ancient was probably the worst cook that ever put baking powder into water, then mixed the flour on top. Also, that his idea of cleansing a frying pan from bacon grease was to swab it out with anything that came handiest, be it a rubber-boot leg or a discarded sock. So he assumed the functions of cook. Likewise, the Forty-niner's ideas of measurement were distorted; for when he cut wood for the stove, it was either from one to six inches too thick to go into the stove door, or from one to six inches too long for the fire-box. So

Lish cut the wood. Moreover, the veteran was nearsighted, and when he brought water from the creek, he frequently scooped up considerable mud, dried leaves, and gravel. So Lish uncomplainingly became the water boy. But if he felt any injury over these trivialities, he concealed them behind an immobile face and twinkling eyes.

"Jack, you're havin' it pretty soft," he communicated to the burro one day, as that person stood with his head in the door, blinking, and patiently waiting for bread scraps, while carelessly brushing flies. The burro, as if by invitation, calmly walked inside, his little hoofs clattering on the floor. Lish, leaning back with his hands behind his head, blew smoke in Jack's face, and added: "Say, who asked you to come on in? Ain't you afraid that old skeesicks, Channel Smith'll come and lam you? Well, don't you mind him. He's all right. He sort of amuses me. He's a right-good old feller."

And, as if by prearrangement, steps were heard outside at that moment crunching over the gravel, and Jack, with a switch of his tail, abruptly turned in a panic, bolted for the door, and almost bowled over the owner of the cabin, who happened, inopportunely, to be entering.

Channel Smith snorted in disdain.

"That-there Jack orter be sold," he declared wrathfully. "We ain't got no use for him here nohow, and we might just as well get shed of him."

Lish grinned, but made no reply, as the old man began preparations to wash his face.

"I think," he went on, "I'll unload him the next time I'm down to camp. I orter get sixteen dollars for him. I wouldn't take no less."

Lish continued to watch him, as he performed that operation he called "sprucin' up."

"Now," he said benevolently, turning toward the man who owned the burro, "if you'll hustle and get the supper ready, I'll be right obleeged. They's a team from the Canady Hill goin' down to Peaceful, and it'll pass my trail in about an hour. If you move quick, I'll let you go down to the camp with me."

Highly amused at the assumption of Channel Smith, Lish hastened to comply, and stood with him at the roadside when the big wagon came grating along over the bowlder-strewn road.

Lish had not been in the camp for a week, and was glad for the opportunity. He sat on a seat by Channel Smith, and, therefore, in that flood of crack-voiced garrulity, had no occasion to speak during the progress of the drive. The wagon

rolled into the camp in the moonlight of the early evening, and stopped in front of the Happy Home, with a loud "Whoa!"

The driver turned to the back seat and spoke to the prospector in a friendly voice.

"We all know about you," he said, "and don't you be scared to come in with us and get somethin' to wash the dust out of your throat. We'll stick by you."

Lish looked at him with a peculiar gleam in his eye.

"Say," he said, "I'm not much of a fighter, and I'm right obliged to you; but I don't reckon I'll need any help. I'm not goin' in. You fellers can find me, when you want me, sittin' down around the Peaceful Hill house. I drank all that was comin' to me long before some of you old gents had graduated from square patches of tarpaulin to short pants. And, besides, I don't like lemonade."

He wandered on down the street, stopping at every shop to look in the window, until he came to the largest in the camp. Its most prominent display was a highly polished brass grocer's scales, on which the light of the kerosene lamp glowed with soft brilliancy. For a long time he stood

and admired the beauty of workmanship, the clearly printed figures, the nickel-plated dial pointer, the solidity of the varnished iron table, and the cleanliness of the tin scoop. He had seen others in the storehouses of different mines, but never one so beautiful as this. A sudden glowing impulse seized him to buy it. He hastened in, asked for it regardless of price, and gamely met the demand by unrolling a worn leather wallet which he had kept concealed somewhere in close proximity to his skin.

"Want to take it with you?" asked the storekeeper, "or can I send it somewhere?"

"Sure I'll take it," asserted Lish. "And, say, can you wrap her up in some fussy kind of paper? Got any tisher?"

The salesman assented, wondering at his customer's peculiar tastes, and fifteen minutes later Lish stood at the kitchen door of the Peaceful Hill Inn. He asked for Maggie. She happened to be there in person.

"Hello," he said, by way of greeting. "How are you gettin' along? I brought you a little present."

Quite proudly he carried it over to the table, and began unwrapping it while she stood and

watched him. He turned to her with such an unconcealed pride that she bit her lip to keep from laughing.

"There," he said. "Did you ever see anything finer than that? Look at her dial. She shines like an angel. And her trimmin's! Ain't they all right? Pretty enough to keep on a table with flowers in her, ain't she?"

The waitress saw that whatever he lacked in taste, he made up in seriousness, and so strove to appear grateful. Perhaps the gift accomplished a result, however, for she permitted him to sit on the edge of the back porch and roll countless cigarettes and tell in his broken sentences of his work.

"I got the gun yet," he asserted. "You don't mind if I carry it a while longer, do you? It feels kind of comfortin' and homelike. Makes a man so peaceful to feel her nestlin' there under his arm."

Neither of them referred to his good-by note; not even when a loud call from the front of the hotel warned him that the team from the Canada Hill was ready to return. He got to his feet and put on his hat. At the foot of the steps he turned and said, "Well, so long, Maggie," and went away, rather proud of that step gained, for he had

willfully dropped the "Miss," and entered upon familiarity which she did not resent.

In the wagon on the way home he rode with the driver, who finally turned to him, when the conversation behind was warm, and said: "Say! Has that old shellback, Channel Smith, got anything good up there? He's been spoutin' his head off like a geyser about how good his showing is. The first thing you fellers know he'll have a stampede on up there. You ought to tell him to keep his mouth shut."

Lish dismissed it with a laugh, and he did not refer to it when he assisted the rather unsteady footsteps of the Forty-niner up the winding trail to their cabin. But it was recalled to him the next forenoon when he heard a voice above him and looked around to see a stranger standing alert, and calmly inspecting him. Something in the man's attitude warned him of trouble, and before he spoke he climbed up to the bank to be on equal footing.

"Whose ground do you think you're workin' on?" the man demanded abruptly, without preliminary.

"Mine as near as I can calculate," asserted Lish, fixing the stranger with his eye.

"Better calculate again, then," hotly asserted

that individual. "This claim's mine. I don't know who you are, or where you came from; but I want you to get off this ground right away."

Lish looked him over quite calmly before he spoke.

"Got anything to prove it beside your word?" he asked.

This appeared to anger the other man. His face turned white, then purple.

"I don't need anything but my word!" he asserted.

"You do for me," was the steady retort. "I want to see the papers, before I move off. Better run along and get 'em."

At this the claimant lost his temper completely, and shook a threatening fist under the prospector's nose.

"You'll get off this ground, and now!" he declared. "If you don't, I'll put you off!"

The prospector appeared almost to wither under that threat, and his drawl became quite plaintive.

"Pshaw, now! Pshaw! Don't do nothin' like that to a greenhorn like me, pardner. There ain't no use in me and you lockin' horns. You go get your papers, and if they're right, I'll walk on off as quiet as Mary's lamb."

"I told you I didn't need any papers," snorted the other man.

"I'm sorry; but I'm right afraid you'll have to have 'em before I go. I'm too lazy to run unless I get a head start, and I ain't got one now."

The claimant launched a quick blow at the prospector, who ducked like lightning, and, without ever shifting his feet, whipped his right arm upward. It was as rigid as an iron bar driven by steam, and met the point of a chin. The claimant's arms suddenly whirled up into the air, and he fell backward. Lish, entirely unruffled, stood and looked at him for a moment, then dropped down into the creek bed, filled his hat with water, returned, and sloshed it over the upturned face. He rolled a cigarette and quietly watched the recovery. The man finally rolled over to his hands and knees, and then got shakily to his feet.

"Now, as you were sayin' a moment ago, mister," Lish said, lighting his cigarette, "it's the papers that counts. I'm glad you're so willin' to go and fetch 'em, because there ain't no use in you and me havin' any fuss over nothin'. If you've got indigestion, or are feelin' weak, you can put your hand on my shoulder and I'll try and support you to the cabin down yonder, where 'most always that old pirate, Channel Smith, has

a bottle of brandy cached away somewhere. We're hospitable and peaceable up here, if we ain't nothin' else. Then, after that, you'll probably want to go and bring them papers, eh?"

The claimant appeared dazed, and obeyed in a perfunctory manner, until the cabin was reached and the brandy found, and absorbed. It appeared to revive him, and he thought the situation over. Finally he laughed, as he stared at Lish, who sat, a picture of solicitous timidity, on the opposite side of the crude little table.

"Say," he said, "you're all right! I don't want to, but I've got to admit I like you. It was my fault, and I got just what I needed. On the level, I own this ground; I've got a buckboard down on the road, and if you'll come and ride over to the Canada Hill with me, Dick Murdock, the superintendent, will tell you I own it, and that he saw me stake it, and that he owns the ground above, and that we registered together. There's not a foot of open ground on this gulch, unless it's due to lack of assessment work."

At this concise statement, so palpably true, the prospector for the first time looked his disappointment.

"You come along over with me, and I'll bring you back," the claimant insisted. "I have no

papers here, or there. They are away over at my home in Placerville. Will you come?"

For answer Lish got up, walked to a peg on the wall, and got his coat, stopped to wash his hands in the basin outside the door, and said: "All right."

He paused long enough to yell to Channel Smith that he would be gone for an hour or two, and led the way to the waiting buckboard.

His late opponent climbed in and picked up the reins in a thoughtful way, glancing sidewise now and then at his passenger.

"My name is Martin," he said. "I don't think I had time to tell you before."

Lish looked up at him as if thinking of something.

"Same name as the man that runs the Cricket," he remarked.

"Yes, he is my brother. I'm opening up another property back on the Divide."

In all the two miles they did not again refer to their recent combat, and Lish appeared to have forgotten it, although now and then Martin rubbed his hand over his chin, as if in his case it was not so easily dismissed. At the Canada Hill they stopped in front of the superintendent's office, and went in.

Murdock, who was looking over some assay slips, and comparing them with mill tabs, stared at them and greeted Martin with boisterous friendliness.

"What's the matter with your jaw, Harry?" he asked.

Martin grinned and turned a thumb in the direction of Lish, who stood quietly inside the door.

"We had some little difficulty in getting acquainted this morning," he said. "I made a mistake. I lost my temper. I don't think he did, and I don't care to be around when he does."

Murdock rolled backward in his office chair and let out a howl of laughter that could have been heard as far as the mess-house. In his paroxysm he leaned too far and the chair toppled over, and then he got to his feet and laughed louder than ever. And all this time the prospector stood, solemn-faced, looking at him as if astonished at his finding anything humorous in the situation.

"I brought him over here," Martin added when the mirth had subsided sufficiently to permit of speech being audible, "to prove to him that I own the ground adjoining Channel Smith's on the up-stream side, staked from rim rock to rim rock, and recorded."

The superintendent sobered instantly, and confirmed all that the claimant had stated.

"I did own the ground above that," he added, "but traded it to John Martin last week for some ground he had up above us here that I want for its water rights."

Lish's face expressed his chagrin.

"I'm sorry," said Murdock, with simple frankness. "I've heard a good deal about you since you were here, and it strikes me we need a few more men like you around these hills. I think that most of the people down in Peaceful would vote to give you a medal. If a job will do you any good, there's one for you here at the Canada."

The prospector shook his head. "Nope," he said, "I don't work for nobody."

"Then why don't you take a lease on that ground of mine," Martin hastened to suggest. "You've done a lot of work there. It's to my interest to have it opened up. I'll make a deal with you. I'll give you two-thirds of anything you take out in the next eighteen months."

Lish shook his head. "Nope. Can't tie myself down for that long! But I'd sure like to know what's in the ground up there. It's right interestin', and, besides, if I made good it would help out Channel Smith. He's a fine old fellow,

is Channel, and he's so dag-goned old, and so poor, that it'd be a godsend to him if somebody could find somethin' on the next claim above."

Martin and Murdock smiled at each other. They saw that the prospector was wavering, and all because he wanted to assist the querulous, queer, old Smith.

"You don't have to bind yourself to stay a day longer than you wish," Martin insisted, and that proved the deciding argument.

"All right. You're on," Lish said, turning toward the door as if that were the end of it. Suddenly he faced back and held out his hand toward Martin. "There ain't no hard feelin's, is there? I'd be right sorry if there was. I've got an orful rotten disposition. There ain't nobody tries harder'n me to be peaceable; but it just does seem like as if ever since I come here to this neck of the woods nobody'll let me tend my own business."

Martin shook the outstretched hand, at which the prospector evinced a pathetic pleasure. He announced that he would be back in a moment, and walked down the trail to the mess-house. He poked his head inside the door and discovered Mrs. Higgins at her work. His reception was not cordial. She did not even answer his cheer-

ful " Good-mornin', ma'am." But it did not alter his demeanor.

" Thought maybe you'd like to know, ma'am, that I got a letter this mornin' from that old bum that married you. I understand they've raised his wages again, but what for, God only knows, because if there ever was a no-account slob it's that same Bill Higgins, ma'am!"

Before she had time to vent her fury in words he was hurrying rapidly off up the trail, grinning to himself and saying, " Lord! What a liar I'm a-gettin' to be! But I'll bet I'll make Marthy and Bill make up, or bust a suspender and the seven commandments tryin'!"

CHAPTER XI

THE TROUBLE-MAKING BURRO

THE philosophy of the prospector would not permit him to be downcast for any great length of time; so it was that, after the first pang of disappointment at finding that he was not working on free ground, he accepted the situation with equanimity. He did not even treasure any ill feeling against Channel Smith for having misinformed him, and made reference to it but once, on the day after his return from Canada Hill.

"You ain't been here very long, have you, Channel?" he asked solicitously.

"Nope, not very long," acquiesced the old veteran. "Lemme see." He sat and laboriously calculated on his fingers, checking off time by important events. "Nope, not very long. I located this ground forty-five year ago this spring. By cracky! I thought it were longer ago than that!"

"Well, you sure kept good tab on what was

goin' on around you!" exclaimed Lish, but without much enthusiasm. "Didn't you ever get time to browse up and down the gulch a little? Didn't you ever see stakes, the bright, shiny kind, with notices on 'em, when you were gallivantin' off on one of them big towers as far as the next claim? I sort of thought you was some walker. You got the trail in the other direction worn two feet deep — the one that led to pie!"

The old man did not answer, but his air expressed so much of penitence for his blunder, that whatever sarcasm Lish had at the end of his tongue was silenced.

"You don't need to feel bad over that claim above, Channel," he said. "It's all right. If she's good, two-thirds is enough. If she ain't, it's just two-thirds more than any man wants. And anyhow, there ain't nothin' more to bother me now. Everything's peaceful and pleasant, and this is the country I've been lookin' for."

On the following morning Jack came gayly tripping into the cabin, thrust his nose deeply into a batch of bread which Channel was preparing, and snorted loudly in sheer enjoyment. The batter blew out and spattered over the floor. Simultaneously with this Mr. Smith attempted to chastise the burro with a chair hastily seized

for the occasion, and the burro, evidently annoyed, elevated both heels with remarkable deftness. Quite accidentally they landed on the big, tin dish pan of batter, which sailed upward, and with astonishing lack of forethought swatted Mr. Smith on his whiskers and forehead. Mr. Smith was annoyed. David Elisha Henley, forgetting diplomacy, rolled over and over on his bunk, voicing an untimely merriment.

The old man disappeared outside the cabin, and the cracking of his joints as he threw the most convenient missiles at the retreating burro, and his storm of quavering epithets, seemed to amuse Lish still further. He got up and went to the door and looked out. Jack would turn his face toward the enraged Channel, and blink at him and switch his tail. Then, when a two-pound stone came hurtling in his direction, he displayed a good judgment of distance by standing still if it fell short, or bounding out of the way and kicking up his heels if it threatened to be well aimed. At sight of Lish in the doorway, he sobered. Lish ran out, thinking it time to interfere lest Channel Smith die of heart failure, and shook his fist at Jack.

"You hit it up for the hills!" commanded the prospector, reaching for a pebble. And the

burro, knowing from painful experience that if he wished to save a swift thump on some part of his hide, he must retreat, hastily laid his ears back, his tail between his legs, and sprinted away until swallowed from sight by the forest.

Channel Smith bestowed an angry look at Jack's master, and then, mumbling profanely, turned toward the basin beside the cabin door.

Smiling gently to himself, Lish tramped away up the gulch to his work.

"It's a fine old world to live in as long as a feller can have somebody like Channel to amuse him," he decided, some two hours later, and stopped to look around at the high hills, sleeping peacefully in the forenoon haze, the motionless patches of green leading away toward the timber line, and the belts of white on the peaks where rested the perpetual snows. His acute ear, attuned to strange sounds, caught a soft noise from below. He turned his head in that direction to discern a man plodding up the trail and looking to right and left as if searching for something. The man came closer. He was a sun-tanned individual, with stooping shoulders.

"Hey," he called, "seen anything of a burro around here?"

"Sure," replied Lish, leaning on his pick-handle.

"A little, mouse-colored one, cross on his back quite plain. His name's Jack," went on the man, coming closer and still looking around.

"Sure I've seen him. What did you want with him?"

"Why, I've seen him several times when comin' around this way, and I just bought him," explained the stranger.

"Bought him?"

"Yes. I paid Channel Smith sixteen dollars for him down there on the trail. He says he ain't got no further use for him, and told me he'd come if I called him Jack," the man stated with admirable simplicity.

Lish threw his pick up on the bank with an exclamation of annoyance. It was all very plain to him that the man was telling the truth. He stood and stared at the ground for an instant, not quite knowing what to do, and lacking his customary decision. It was plain to him that the doddering old man had sold the pet burro, and that, at least, would never do.

"Look here, mister," he said, "I'm goin' to tell you somethin'. That burro don't belong to Channel Smith. He belongs to me, and I'd sell the best friend I've got just about as quick as I'd sell Jack. The old feller's sort of queer,

so you don't want to pay any attention at all to him. You say you gave sixteen for the burro. Well, here it is back."

He fumbled inside his shirt, drew out a belt, opened it, and counted out sixteen sweat-stained, worn dollars, in faded currency, which the stranger hesitated to take.

"I'd like the burro," the man said; "but if he belongs to you and you don't want to sell him —"

"Which is exactly the case!"

"Then I reckon I'd better go to that old codger and get my money back."

"Never mind that," Lish said emphatically. "I'll get it back from him, and this'll save time."

The man took the money, shook his head with a great show of bewilderment, and turned back down the trail. Lish stood on the bank and watched him go, then followed along after him until he saw him turn into the road where the trail ended. He went back to his work with a troubled spirit.

"It just does seem as if it's one thing after another botherin' me," he said to himself with a show of wrath. "No sooner do I get one thing straightened out and think everything's all right, before another happenin' comes to make a fuss."

At noon he waited for Channel Smith to speak. The patriarch shoveled in his food industriously, but for a long time did not look up. He finished his meal, and then took sixteen dollars from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"What's this for?" demanded the prospector, looking at him.

"That's what I got for that pesky burro," the old man growled. "I got rid of him this mornin'. You can have the money."

"That's right good of you," answered Lish, pocketing the money.

Something in his tone caused Channel to look at him more closely. Feeling a trifle ashamed of himself, the patriarch hastened out of the cabin and over the little trail leading to his trenches. Quite anxiously, throughout the afternoon, he looked up at intervals, waiting to see if the prospector was coming; but always there was the same stillness and lack of life in the scenery. He began to regret his sale of the burro, and to wish he had suffered that animal's pranks more patiently. He dreaded returning to the cabin, and worked later than usual, to at last throw down his shovel and climb stiffly out and plod up the trail. He came around the bend and saw the cabin. There was no smoke curling from its

stove-pipe, and the door was closed. The old man sustained a terrible fear, and went more rapidly toward it, and threw the door open. The place was empty, as it had been before Henley came to join him. A note on the table caught his attention, and he went to the shelf and fumbled around for his steel-bowed glasses, which he adjusted to his eyes with trembling fingers, after which he carried the note outside where the light was stronger, and read:

me and Jack aint goin to bother you no more. he is a mischeevus little cuss and I dont blame you for wantin to get shed of us. we cleaned the cabin and left her just as she was when we came.

DAVID ELISHA HENLEY.

A great sense of outrage swelled in Channel Smith's bosom. The idea that this prospector should take the loss of a burro so much to heart was incomprehensible. It would have been different if he had sold Jack and kept the money; but to desert in this fashion, and leave him to cook his own meals, and cut his own wood, and carry his own water, was certainly a rank injustice. And that, too, after he had been so kind to the prospector, and assisted him to locate on another man's claim! He asserted loudly that times and men weren't like they used to be in

forty-nine, and consigned Lish and his burro to an unpleasant hereafter.

For the first time in weeks he prepared his own supper, and ate it alone. Stubborn as he was, he had to admit it was lonesome again, and his sense of outrage dissipated itself by the time he had shoved the table back against the wall and walked to the bench outside for his evening smoke. He began to be curious as to where Lish had betaken himself, and decided to walk up the gulch to the claim above. He trudged away in the early gloom of the evening to the bend of the road, entered the cut-off which trailed through the heavy timber where it was quite dark, and emerged above the prospect holes that had been sunk by his erstwhile companion. He stooped and emitted a soft exclamation.

Down below him was a worn tent, well lighted by candles inside, and two shadows were thrown through its wall in distorted shape; but they were plainly those of a man bareheaded and a burro with very long ears, and now, straining his eyes, he could see that another gray, old burro was standing with his head inside the tent fly, and calmly watching the scene.

Mr. Smith turned angrily and tramped back, cursing in time to his footsteps.

"Well, if he'd rather associate with a mule than me, he's blamed good and welcome!" he remarked audibly, as he swung in toward his own cabin. "There ain't no accountin' for tastes!"

On the following morning, however, Channel appeared to have business up at the head of the creek. He passed along the bank where Lish was energetically toiling away in a trench, and the latter looked up at him.

"Good-mornin', Mister Henley," said the Forty-niner, with a great assumption of dignity.

"Good-mornin', Mister Smith," the prospector answered.

The one did not stop walking nor the other working; but Lish looked up with a grin as the bent, old back disappeared in the bend above.

"Poor, old cuss!" he said, with commiseration. "I s'pose I orter be ashamed of myself goin' off that way. He's sure too old to be left alone to do all the work; but I couldn't go back on Jack."

He stood for a full minute as if thinking of something, then climbed out of the trench, grumbling, and went back to his tent, where he picked up his ax from a log in front, threw it over his shoulder, and started down the trail.

"It just does seem as if everywhere I go, I got to do somethin' I don't want to!" he mourned,

as he came in front of the cabin that had so lately been his domicile. He sighted something looking at him, with due caution, from around the end of that homely shack, and opened his mouth in astonishment. It proved to be a pair of long ears and a burro's face, with just a part of one eye peering at him. He made an angry dash at it and shouted, "You Jack! Git home! Go on up the gulch!" He waved his arm, indicating the direction, gathered a small stone, and threw it with quick precision.

Jack, who was already on his way, kicked as the rock caught him on the ribs, and tore madly off toward the tent. Then, still grumbling, Lish fell upon a log with his ax and worked with determined haste to accumulate firewood. The wood fell around him in a scattered pile, and this he collected and heaped carefully up with the small stack outside the cabin.

"That'll run the poor old son of a gun for a couple or three days!" he declared, and then, as if ashamed of his philanthropy, avoided the trail and took a roundabout course for the claim above. And Channel Smith, doddering down the gulch past the prospector's trenches, wondered where that gentleman could have gone to spend the afternoon.

On the following day Channel came to the claim above, "just to see how the work was gettin' on," and said he hoped Lish was "right comfortable." He expressed great solicitude, however, as to whether the tent would shed rain later in the season. The next day's advances were more open, Channel arriving at the tent just in time to be invited in to partake of pork and beans. He stayed quite late that evening, and departed with obvious regret. On the next day he got around in time for breakfast, disappeared for the noon meal, and cheerfully poked his head through the tent fly in time for supper. Lish watched him good-naturedly from the corner of his eye; but made no comment.

"To-morrer," said Channel, "I think you'd better lay off work in the afternoon. I'll let you come with me over to the Canady Hill. It's pie day."

Lish accepted with alacrity, for reasons known to himself. And it was with the same alacrity, as if assured of his welcome, that he walked into the mess-house of the Canada Hill Mine when the hour came for the quest of pies.

"Channel, he asked me to come, Mrs. Higgins," he said, cheerfully depositing his hat on the floor. "Says I to Channel, 'Maybe that woman

over there, havin' so many troubles of her own, won't want a feller like me stickin' his nose into the kitchen;' but Channel he says he knows you'd like to see me again, so I came over. And I'm right glad I'm here. Seems kind of homelike for all of us to be here with the smell of the cookin' around us, don't it, ma'am?"

Channel Smith, in the meantime, sat and stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. It was the first time he had heard of the conversation, and his wits were too slow to catch the broad wink that accompanied the speech.

"What on earth are you winkin' at me that way for, Lish Henley?" he burst out; but Mrs. Higgins, angrily intent on her work over the oven at the moment, lost the significance of the question and passed it over. For half an hour the prospector sat there, apparently unaware of Mrs. Higgins' animosity, devoting his conversation to Channel Smith and exploiting the beauties of Keswick, and abusing a man he knew up there, who bore the name of Bill.

He even had the effrontery to insist on shaking hands with Mrs. Higgins when they made their departure, and chuckled to himself on the homeward trail.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROSPECTOR PROPOSES

IT was Saturday afternoon, and the prospector made elaborate preparations. He puttered around his tent, blacking his boots, cleaning spots from his clothes, painstakingly pressing his necktie, and selecting divers articles of wearing apparel with which to bedeck himself. He packed his effects into a bag, and sauntered over to Jack, who was sleeping in the shade of a big tree, caught him by the muzzle, and brought him to the tent, where he threw on a pack saddle to which he lashed his light burden. He tied the strings of the tent fly, gave a last look to be certain that the fire had died out of the camp stove, and jauntily started down the trail, with Jack following obediently behind.

Channel Smith looked up as he passed. "Where do you reckon you're goin' now?" he shouted.

"Down to Peaceful," was the response. "To-

morrer's church day, and I said I'd be there. I ain't a-goin' to miss no services. I've turned over a new leaf. Besides, I sort of like it. It gives me a chance to sing along with other folks, and I'm right tired of singin' alone."

The ancient gave a grunt of disgust. "What you got in that there bag?"

"Duds."

"That's all?"

"Yep! That's all."

Lish kept moving down the gulch as the conversation progressed until he was out of earshot with his last remark, and out of sight in the twist of the trail. He smiled with a slow, humorous smile, and spoke to Jack.

"I was afraid that cantankerous old cuss would want to come along," he said, "and out of deeference to your dislikin' of him, am glad he didn't."

But Jack, pretending to be terribly overworked, and staggering under the bundle of ten pounds' weight, did not answer. The prospector, apparently happy in his mind, whistled and sang, and walked so rapidly that now and then the burro had to trot to keep pace. The road was so little traveled that it seemed an isolation, and they met or passed no one as their journey progressed and the

miles slipped behind them. It was not until they came to the open top of a little hill, wind-swept and bowlder-strewn, that Lish stopped for a breathing spell. Something in the burro's attitude attracted his attention, and he eyed the beast suspiciously for a moment.

"What's ailin' you now?" he asked, and Jack tried to look unconcerned and merely thoughtful.

Lish got on a little bowlder by the side of the road, and looked back. Just appearing where the trail emerged from the timber he saw something move, then halt. His eyebrows frowned for a moment, and then he laughed.

"So that's it, eh?" he again addressed Jack, and then called loudly: "Hey, you, Pete! Come here!" He followed this with a long series of coaxing whistles, and at last, from the woods, trotting forward, came Pete, who had refused to be left behind.

"It certainly does look to me," declared Lish, resuming his journey, "as if I have to take my whole blamed family with me no matter where I go. I reckon I'll have to corral 'em again to keep 'em from follerin' me plumb into the meetin'-house to-morrer."

But his annoyance was merely assumed, as he proved by petting the ancient Pete when, with

confidence fully regained, that animal joined Jack at his heels. It was well into the evening when he corralled his animals at Peaceful Hill and took the bag on his shoulder and headed for the hotel, wondering whether he would be too late for the supper hours in that hostelry where dwelt the girl with red hair. Out in front was the usual crowd of evening loungers, which he ignored as he strode through to the desk. The clerk told him he was too late. He calmly explored the house in the direction that he thought would lead him to the kitchen, and, being a good explorer, came at last to his goal. He opened the door and poked his head through to discover Maggie talking to the Chinese cook. He lost no time in going through the rest of the way and shaking her hand.

"Say, Maggie," he opened, "I've come a right long way to 'tend the meetin' to-morrer. I was afraid you'd miss me."

"Miss you?" she laughed. "Miss you! What for, I'd like to know?"

He assumed a very hurt air, and leaned weakly against the door jamb.

"I'd talk to you about that," he said, "if I wa'n't so weak. You see, the grub was gettin' mighty short up there at the claim, and I've been workin' so hard, that this long walk down here

has kind of taken all the tucker out of me. I'm afraid I'll have to go now and rustle some cheese, and crackers, and sardines, before I'll have my strength back."

"Rustle some cold stuff? You'll do nothing of the kind!" she asserted in angry haste. "You just sit right down on the porch out there, Lish Henley, and I'll get something for you right here, if the cook won't."

He did not dare smile until he was by himself in the dusk of the porch, and then he grinned joyously as he heard the sound of sizzling ham and eggs inside.

"You better go into the dining-room to eat," Maggie called to him from the door.

"Would you mind if I ate out here?" he promptly returned. "I'm sort of used to eatin' where the cookin' is. I've always been right partial to takin' my sustenance in the kitchen."

She turned and threw a tablecloth over the kitchen table and placed the food there for him, turning the reflector of a wall lamp downward, so that he might have the full benefit, and he walked in and washed himself under the faucet of the kitchen sink, and dried himself on the kitchen towel.

"Humph!" she asserted. "You certainly do

have a faculty of making yourself at home. I never saw the beat of your nerve."

"Yep," he responded cheerfully. "I can sure feel comfortable and peaceful in any surroundin's where there's so much good society."

"Meaning the chink, I suppose," she retorted.

He looked at the cook, who had calmly seated himself in the window sill, where he sat swinging his legs and dangling his embroidered slippers.

"I hope as how I'm not keepin' you up, John?" asked Lish solicitously.

"Nope," was the laconic answer.

"And I also hopes that you ain't too tired to go to bed?" went on the prospector.

"Me vellee well. Thlanks," replied the cook, with a grin of amusement.

Lish still looked at him suggestively; but the cook insisted on ignoring his palpable desire to be rid of him. The prospector then took a silver dollar from his pocket and flipped it toward his deftly opened fingers.

"Go play fan-tan with that," he said. "It ought to be your lucky night."

Maggie at first opened her lips as if to speak, and then appeared flustered into silence. Lish did not look at her, and she pretended not to have heard the conversation, and to be very busy

with minor duties. The cook winked and grinned, and got down from the window. He coiled his queue around his head, picked a big black hat from the wall, and disappeared with a "Vellee good. Me play."

Maggie relented sufficiently to take the seat in the window which the cook had vacated, and smiled at him with amusement.

"You certainly do have a way with you," she observed with admiration. He did not pause to answer, being totally absorbed in his food. "Sometimes you remind me quite a lot of Ross." He ate faster, and appeared to be thinking rapidly. "You ain't a lot unlike him," she added, then, finding it useless to talk to him until he had finished his meal, subsided.

He suddenly lifted his head, with the last fragment of ham with which he had scoured his plate, poised on his fork, and listened to some sound outside which her ear had not caught. It became audible, and resolved itself into heavy footsteps that clumped up on the porch, then across it, and to the door. They both looked up curiously, and the prospector gave a grunt of disgust; for there, calmly grinning, stood Channel Smith.

"Well," he said cheerfully, as if certain of his welcome, "I got here! Come down with a

wagon from Canady Hill. Had quite a passel of trouble to find you."

He walked in, deposited his hat on the floor, and sat down.

"That fool mule of your'n, the gray one, he went hell-bent for election down the trail about ten minutes after you," Channel quavered on placidly. "I reckon we'd orter sell him. We ain't got no use for two burros hangin' around on my gulch."

The prospector stared at him thoughtfully for a full half-minute, and then came as near to shrugging his shoulders as was possible.

"First thing I know," he said, "you'll be wantin' to sell me off'n your gulch. Nope. Me and my burros stick together."

Channel opened his mouth and looked at him; then, with a quick reversal, said: "Sure you do! Don't blame you a bit. You know I always argued against your sellin' that Jack. Says I to you: 'Don't sell him! He ain't nothin' but a little friendly cuss, what don't give nobody no bother at all. I likes to have him around!' I was right glad you didn't get shed of him. It does me good the way you've come to your senses."

For an instant Lish stared at him in sheer as-

tonishment, then slapped his leg and declared: "By jingoes! I reckon you're right! We won't sell my burros."

"Now about eatin'?" ruminated Channel, rubbing his hands. "I see as how you've been havin' ham and eggs. They allays have been favori-ites of mine. I wish I'd of got here sooner."

"Ham and eggs, eh? Well, it is a pity you didn't come sooner," declared Maggie staring at him with a sarcastic look. "If you think this is a meals-at-all-hours dump, you've got a few more thoughts coming."

Channel looked up at her with rheumy eyes, and shook his head sadly.

"I don't know what this younger generation's a-comin' to," he said plaintively. "I'm powerful hungry, I am. It's right hard on an old feller like me to be so hungry. I could get plain things like canned tomatoes and such at the stores, but it does seem as if I —"

"Oh, shucks!" she interrupted.

"Say, Miss Maggie," Lish said, studying her face with anxiety, "you ain't the kind that would see an old feller like this hungry, are you? He ain't so bad, Channel ain't. Go ahead and get him somethin', won't you? Do it for me."

Her wrath subsided, and she said she supposed she would have to. The prospector unmasked none of his disappointment at the patriarch's arrival, but thanked her profusely and tried to appear interested in Channel's discourse. It got to be too much for even him, and he withdrew himself to the edge of the porch and sat there, discouraged, until she put the food before the ancient, then came out, and sat down beside him, but at a respectful distance. He lost no time.

"Maggie," he declared, "I ain't seen you many times, but I've been doin' a heap of thinkin'. I guess we better get married."

"You think — you guess! Pshaw! Why, you're crazy! Don't you ever talk that way to me again, Lish Henley. I can take care of myself, I can. I don't want any idiot like you around, bothering me with talk of that kind. You just stop it, if you want me to be decent to you any more. Do you understand?"

She had got to her feet; but the prospector sat steadily.

"All right," he declared. "I'm just tellin' you what I thought, Maggie. I didn't go for to say nothin' to make you sore. There ain't no offense. If you don't want to hitch up with me, all right! And what's more," he declared, in a

sudden burst of generosity, as if to prove his forgiveness, "you don't even need to give them scales back to me, either!"

She leaned against the post and laughed; but he did not join her merriment.

"Now we'll talk sense a while," she said, relenting a trifle. "Do you know that eggs has gone up ten cents a dozen?"

And thereupon he plunged into a long discourse on eggs he had eaten, found, and seen, as if they were the only things in the world worth considering, until Channel Smith emerged, wiping his beard with the palm of his hand, and satisfied.

But he showed a frank desire to be certain that the old man did not miss the wagon back up into the mountains, and stuck to him closely, when they left the back porch of the Peaceful Hill Inn. He even accompanied him to the Happy Home, examining his gun in the interests of peace, however, before entering. He was greeted with apprehension on the part of Holliday, and black scowls from the men around the tables, to all of which he turned a careless grin. He even noted the presence of Bill, but did not speak to that worthy, who calmly ignored him. One or two men who did not know him, and whom he did not remember seeing before, observed the en-

trance of Channel Smith with much enjoyment, and hilariously began badgering that worthy.

The smile on Lish's face appeared to deepen, but it had different lines in its composition. He sidled in between Channel Smith and those who were passing facetious remarks. He whirled suddenly at the sound of something that was said, and stared straight at the man speaking.

"Say," he said calmly, "you ain't pokin' fun at an old chap like this-here Channel Smith, are you? I'd hate to think anybody'd be mean enough to do that. Why, he's one of the nicest men that ever walked. More'n that, he's old enough to granddaddy anybody in this crowd. I surely am surprised some."

The hilarious ones nudged one another, and in the meantime the prospector stood languidly leaning an elbow on the bar and staring at them, a picture of peaceful intent and innocence. Holliday nervously rushed into the breach.

"Hey, you fellers," he said, "just chop off this familiarity in here. You mind your own business, or I'll get busy with a bung starter." He hurriedly beckoned to the leader of the trio, and held a big hand over his mouth as he hoarsely whispered: "Better leave that little cuss alone! He's a box of dynamite with the fuses all cut

short. For Heaven's sake, don't start nothin' with him, because the devil himself, turned loose, wouldn't muss this place up half as bad as that feller if you get him going, and it don't take as much breeze to start him as it does to blow a thistle tassel off'n a dry road!"

"Channel! Channel Smith!" a voice hailed outside the Happy Home, and the prospector seized the old man's arm and gently pushed him toward the door.

"I reckon that's your wagon, pardner," he said, and before the veteran could remonstrate, had fairly hustled him out and into it. "Good-night, Channel," he called. "See you some time to-morrer. Don't fret yourself none because I'm not there. So long!"

He turned just in time to see a woman hurrying past the place with a determined air, and suddenly hailed her.

"Good-evenin', Mrs. Callahan," he said.

She turned and looked at him, and gave a toss of recognition.

"For the love of Mike!" she exclaimed, "you weren't long in findin' Holliday's on that day you showed up here, were you?"

She stood with both arms akimbo for a moment, and then laughed at him, for he had removed his

hat and stood scratching his head. She started off down the street, and he started in her wake with his usual quickness of decision.

"I found Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he declared, by way of conversation, shouting it at her back.

"Well, you don't need to tell the whole camp about it!" she snapped, turning her head over her shoulder; but he hastened to gain a place by her side. For an instant she threatened to decline to walk with him, and then, as if thinking of something, her attitude changed.

"Say, Henley," she said, "you're a funny man. What makes you such a fool?"

He placidly explained that he was just naturally born that way.

"Well, not that I'm blamin' you for what you did down there at the church, and havin' small interest in it myself, me bein' a Catholic, and by the same token likin' you for goin' after the likes of them, but don't you know that Big Bill's a bad man? It's a black-browed, thievin' blackguard he is. I'm tellin' you, Mister Henley, have a care for yourself!"

He assured her that there existed no man who had more care for David Elisha Henley than that same estimable gentleman; that he was scared till he could not sleep nights; that he visited the

has kind of taken all the tucker out of me. I'm afraid I'll have to go now and rustle some cheese, and crackers, and sardines, before I'll have my strength back."

"Rustle some cold stuff? You'll do nothing of the kind!" she asserted in angry haste. "You just sit right down on the porch out there, Lish Henley, and I'll get something for you right here, if the cook won't."

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"Humph!" she asserted. "You certainly do

CHAPTER XIII

MORE TROUBLE FOR THE LOVER OF PEACE

ARRAYED in all the finery at his command, Lish attended church that Sunday, and, although it was well filled, there was scarcely a rustle throughout the services. He sustained a sense of disappointment despite the peace that must have been as deep and perfect as he could have wished, for there was not a hymn save the doxology that he knew.

Maggie refused even to speak to him; everyone stared at him and whispered when he entered; and the preacher added to his embarrassment by hastening down from the pulpit at the conclusion of the service, and loudly thanking him for his attendance.

Lish recovered sufficiently to put his big, hard hand up to his mouth and whisper loudly: "Say, parson, when I come next time, sing some of them good old tunes I used to know when I was a kid —'Pull for the Shore, Sailor,' and 'Rock of

Ages,' and 'Shall We Get Together at the River.' They're the only ones I know, and Lordy! you ain't no idea how much more I enjoy singin' than I do preachin'. Not that you ain't all right, even if you ain't very strong on the hell-and-brimstone stuff. You don't skeer 'em enough, parson! You try hard enough, but you want to make 'em think they're goin' to have a hell of a time if they stack the cards or play a crooked game here! That's right, parson! But I'm with you, just the same!"

He broke off abruptly, to the preacher's amazement, and bolted through the meager crowd. He had just discovered, in the midst of his religious enthusiasm, that Maggie, the red-headed girl, had escaped. She was far down the street when he gained the front of the church lot and looked anxiously down the tree-bordered way. And hasten as he did, he could not overtake her before she reached the hotel, although in the last lap of his pursuit they were almost running a foot race.

"Howdy, Miss Maggie," he saluted her, when she came to take his order at the table, but she frigidly refused the amenities. It did not appear to have any effect on him. "Fine service we had this mornin', wa'n't it? That part where the

parson spoke about bein' led through green pastures and —"

"I said there was roast beef, mutton stew, and corned beef and cabbage," she interrupted.

"Maggie," he said humbly, "I think I'll have to eat some of the sheep." She was gone before the echo of his voice had died away, and he did not have another opportunity to speak to her before he made his regretful departure, an hour later. He communed doubtfully with himself as he trudged over the road, followed by his burros.

"With most of 'em, the best way is to make 'em jealous. Then there's others that a feller has to be spoony with, and still some more, mavericks, I call 'em, whose affections is dependent on how big a bank roll a feller flashes; but I'm beginnin' to be afraid she ain't none of them kind, and I'm just plumb discouraged! A man can't have the whole shop full of peace unless he's got the right kind of a wife for full measure, and this-here Maggie's the first one I ever saw whose lookin's I like. So here I am at Peaceful Hill, and got everything but the woman."

He was surprised when he arrived at Channel's claim to see that its owner was nowhere in sight, and went up to the cabin to see if any ill fortune

or accident had befallen him. But the cabin was unoccupied, although it gave evidence that the ancient had stopped there over night. Lish surmised that he had gone over to the Canada Hill Mine for some foolish reason, so began his work. It was almost noon when he heard a shout from the bank above, and saw Channel standing there with an unusually troubled look on his face.

"I been to the Canady," said Channel, squatting down on the nearest rampart of dirt, "and Miss Higgins, she's right sick."

Lish gave instant and undivided attention.

"Everybody over there's sort of fussed up over it," the old man added. "Not about the cookin', because they can get along with the boy; but because Miss Higgins won't let Murdock send her down to Peaceful, and there ain't no woman they reckon they can get to come and set with her."

Lish immediately crawled up out of the pit in which he had been working, and got to the bank. "I'll go right over there and see about that," he declared. "You see, she's a sort of a friend of a friend of mine, and I feel I orter look after her some."

Without pausing to get his coat he stalked away over the trail, and Channel, with a melan-

choly sigh, followed after him to his own claim, and watched him from sight.

Just as Lish came out into the road a man driving a buckboard came along, and the prospector, without hesitation, asked him for the privilege of a ride, which was granted. He climbed in and explained his reason.

"I'm goin' over to the Canady Hill to see a sick woman," Lish said, "or I'd just as soon hoof it."

"That's where I am going," the man said. "I'm a doctor. They sent word down to the camp for me to come up."

Lish looked relieved; but was, none the less, determined to visit Bill Higgins' wife and form his own conclusions. At the door of her cabin he decided it might be wiser for him to remain outside, which he did, with rare patience, until the doctor emerged. Murdock came also, and looked gravely at the physician.

"That woman in there threatens to be pretty ill," the doctor announced. "She ought to have some woman with her to act as nurse; but to save my life I don't know of anyone we can get in Peaceful. I'm afraid we shall have to send out to get one, maybe to Sacramento, and that means, perhaps, five or six days, maybe longer. Nurses

from down there don't like to come this far away."

The prospector interjected himself into the conversation.

"Excuse me, Doc," he said, "but I got an idea I can get a woman, if Murdock will lend me a rig to go and try."

The superintendent did not hesitate a minute, but bawled to a yardman several hundred yards up the creek to hitch up his own horse to his buckboard, and bring it out to the flat.

"There," he said; "that fixes you. You can go straight down and have a try at it. My mare's skittish, sometimes, and she has a tender mouth; but I have an idea you know horses."

Lish nodded. "Know 'em?" he said. "I know 'em as well as if I was of the hoss family. I'll watch her, and she and me'll get along all right."

The doctor was already climbing into his vehicle. "Come to my office before you start back," he said, "and I'll send some more medicine up, and if you get a woman, I will tell her what to do."

He drove away, and Lish walked with Murdock to the flat. As he climbed in and picked up the reins, the superintendent spoke to him.

"Don't let any reasonable amount of money stand in the way," he said. "But if you can make it, get a woman."

Lish nodded again, and drove away. He found the mare just as described by her owner, but his voice pacified her and steadied her, with its quiet, "Whoa-a, girl! Whoa-a!" Once he got out, and walked around, and caressed her, and she put her muzzle out and made friends with him, as did all animals with whom he came in contact. It had been no vain boast he had made to the superintendent when he told him that he was a horseman. He had gone so rapidly that he trailed almost at the tail of the doctor's buckboard when that professional man, whose horse was speedy, entered the streets of the camp.

Lish drove on past the doctor's office until he came to the stage station, where he asked if the mare could be taken out and cared for until his return. He then walked away toward the Peaceful Hill Inn with a well-defined idea, and around to the rear door. His knowledge of the hours told him that Maggie would probably be through with the midday work, and this surmise he found correct.

"Hello!" he said, climbing the steps to the porch.

She looked at him with a far-away stare. He held out his hand, and she took it with as much nonchalance as if he were not quite, but almost, a stranger.

"I reckon you'd better get some duds together and come with me up to the Canady Hill Mine," he said, without any hesitancy.

"Oh, you do, eh?" she replied, and then he appeared to realize that he had not yet given any reason why.

"It's Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he said. "Don't s'pose you know her, but she's a woman."

"Why, how strange! She's a woman, is she — Mrs. Marthy Higgins?"

Lish persisted in ignoring any sarcasm. "Yes, she's some woman, is Mrs. Marthy. And she's sick."

"Do you keep track of all the women on the Divide?" the waitress asked. "If you do, you've got more time than I have. I've got my own business to attend to, and I find it keeps me pretty fairly busy."

For the first time he had confidence in himself. His earnestness overcame his embarrassment. He stepped up to the last step of the porch, and looked at her gravely, his gray eyes having lost their twinkle and appearing deep and warm.

"Maggie," he said, "this ain't what I'd expected of you. You disappoint me. If you feel that way, and ain't just talkin' because you're sore about somethin', I'm mighty sorry; because, Maggie, I want to tell you that there ain't none of us so big we can keep from rubbin' elbows with the others, and there ain't no place in the world so lonesome and far away that it ain't made a little bit nicer by havin' someone else to think about. Sometimes it's only a stranger, as far as names and such go, but nobody's a stranger to me, or to anybody else who's decent, when they're in trouble. It ain't what you do for other people that does them good, so much as it is the good you do for yourself by doin' it. I've done a heap of things in my life, but the things that stick was the ones I did for somebody else — even if I forget 'em, Maggie, because I sort of reckon a man or a woman can't do anything that's good and kind for someone else, no matter how small it is, without its sort of makin' 'em sweeter themselves."

His earnestness had carried him along until the soft light in his eyes had deepened to a glow. The man was preaching a doctrine of life, all mixed up with illiteracy, and incongruous with one capable of extreme cold and strenuous decision. His very homeliness had been glorified, and the

red-headed waitress gasped, and stared at him in astonishment, discovering that a new man stood before her, of whom she was a trifle afraid, and, moreover, she sustained a sense of shame as if she had been chastised.

"Well?" she faltered.

"That's all," he said, smiling gently and looking out across at the far-distant peaks. "That's all. Mrs. Marthy Higgins is a woman, and she's sick in a camp where there ain't no other woman to help her, and she needs a woman! She's got to have one, Maggie. I want you to fix it up somehow so's you can go."

"Go!" she gasped. "Why, what on earth would they do here at the hotel?" It was as if all her life revolved around it. "Why, I've been here for eight years! Someone must wait on the tables, and 'tend to things."

He ran his fingers through his hair, forgetting that they were still covered with the dust of dried clay, and looked perplexed.

"Do you reckon," he asked, brightening with resource, "that I could get the Widder Callahan to go?"

Maggie shook her head.

"No, she has three children to look after. They go to school."

He slapped his leg with his battered hat and exclaimed: "Bully! I see how. The widder can come over here and sling the grub. The boss can tell the boarders that she ain't no great shakes as a hustler in an eatin' house, but that she's here because you went to nurse a sick woman. Then, if there's any man that kicks up ugly, the boss can send for me, and I'll just naturally load up that gun of your'n and come down here and shoot his cussed head off! Easy, ain't it?"

Somewhat bewildered by the prospector's ideas of humanity, the waitress agreed, and Lish, intent on his mission, hastened away, after telling her he would let her know within the hour. He found the widow over her washtubs. He looked at her shrewdly and attacked her from a different angle than he had adopted with Maggie. He was learning diplomacy, and exercising all previous knowledge of the sex.

"You work for a livin', I take it," he said pleasantly, "and it's good to work, ain't it?"

"You don't suppose I'd be scrubbin' clothes for fun, or excitement, or joy, every day I can get 'em to do, do you?" she asked, favoring him with a broad grin.

"I've been sort of wonderin' sometimes, when I see you workin', how much more you make than

the shift boss of a mine, or a packer, or a storekeeper?" he said, staring at the calloused spots on his hands. "I suppose you make sometimes as much as five or ten a day, don't you?"

The Widow Callahan, plunging her hands into the tub, laughed heartily, a big, strong, Irish laugh.

"If I could make three a day," she said, lifting and rinsing a garment, "I'd be buyin' a patent wash machine, a new wringer with double rolls, and that fine set of books for which I got an advertisement the other day—'Father Cassady's Lives of the Blessed Saints.'"

"I know where you can get them Saints without lookin' very far," he bravely asserted, seeing his opening. "A friend of mine has a set I could get for you, I think. He's read 'em."

He lied as unblushingly in his good cause as if he had never met Truth. Her face broadened with delight. He felt that he was gaining ground.

"And I think I know where you can make five dollars a day for maybe a week, maybe ten days, maybe two weeks," he added, hastening to lose no iota of his advantage.

The wet garment was dropped back into the tub with a splash.

"Here?" she asked.

"Sure. Takin' Maggie — Maggie — Well,

wouldn't that beat you! I swan I don't know her other name! It's a cinch she's got one. Most people has. Anyhow, she's that lady that works down at the hotel."

The widow laughed contemptuously, and told him to quit his blarneying.

"Dead earnest!" he declared. "I think they'll want you down there."

"But I'm not knowin' how," she explained. "They do tell me that waitin' on a table is the same as doctorin'. You have to know how. Not that I couldn't get the stuff on the table. When Mike Callahan, that was — Heaven save his bold Irish soul — would see me bringin' the things on, he used to say, 'You got all of it here you didn't drop, Kitty!' but he was a jewel, was Mike, and never kicked at eatin' things that had fallen on the floor — 'specially baked potatoes. I never knew him to holler but once. That was when the stuff that fell happened to be noodle soup. But it's a Dutch dish, anyhow!"

Lish told her in his direct fashion that the reason was because there was a sick woman who needed assistance. This as an after argument, and yet he flattered himself on his adroitness when she abruptly asserted that she would go to the hotel and work her hands off in such a cause, and

he wondered why, as he departed, she looked at him and said, "May the Lord bless your big, fat heart! There was but one better, and that was Mike Callahan. It's a shame that most good men can't hold more than a quart!"

Lish walked away down the street with a highly troubled look on his face, and grumbling.

"Talk about peace," he declared. "I'm always a-gettin' my cinches twisted! Now I reckon I'll have to spend the rest of my life tryin' to find them Cassady's Saints!"

He plunged into the hotel and up to the desk.

"You're the boss, ain't you?" he demanded of the man he had previously supposed to be the clerk. On receiving an assurance that this was the case, the prospector drew a deeper breath, and said: "Well, I don't s'pose you know that Maggie is goin' to take a lay-off, and that so's the house won't stop, the Widder Callahan is goin' to help out till Maggie gets back?"

The proprietor's mouth hung open as if he had lost muscular power.

"Say, you're Henley, aren't you?" he asked.

"David Elisha Henley."

"Well, you're a-feelin' right, are you? Nothin' the matter with your head? Sun ain't

been too hot, or anything like that, has it?" There was actual anxiety in his tone.

Lish leaned across the counter and grew confidential as he repeated his tale of the sick woman back in the hills with none around her but men to minister to her wants.

The hotel man appeared sympathetic. "Have you talked to Maggie and the widder?" he asked. "Because if you ain't, you'll have to. I ain't got the nerve. That's a man's job, that is!"

Lish assured him that he had. "All you got to do," he said, "is to let the widder think she's gettin' five a day. I'll pay the difference between her and Maggie's wages. Then you stick around the dinin'-room, and if anybody kicks about the way the widder dishes it out, call 'em down. If you need help, put a man on a cayuse and send him up to me. Does it go?"

The proprietor of the hotel shoved his hand across and grasped the prospector's.

"Say," he said, "I began to suspect you were a sort of a man when you first showed up here in Peaceful, and now I'm just beginnin' to be sure. Of course it goes. Go and tell the women it's all right."

Lish was more embarrassed at this open praise than he had been the whole day, and was glad to

go to the kitchen and explain it to Maggie, which he did in a direct way.

"Get what duds you need rolled up," he said, "so's we can hit the trail as soon as I can get my hoss and go down and tell the widder. That boss of your'n ain't such a slob, after all. He's like most folks — get on the right side of 'em and they'll do the right thing. Get on the wrong side, and there's old hob to pay. Get a hustle now, Maggie!"

He brought the word that the widow would appear at the hotel as soon as the rest of the wash was hung out on the lines, and the children had returned from school, and, with Maggie by his side, drove to the doctor's office, where she was duly instructed. He breathed his first full breath after the camp was left behind them, and then remarked: "They call this camp Peaceful Hill; but there's more kinds of trouble to walk out and meet a man here than in any place I've ever been in, outside of an Apache war camp, and yet they do say that even the Apaches get quiet and straightened out after a while. That's because they was such peaceful men shootin' at 'em!"

CHAPTER XIV

ON KEEPING A CLOSE MOUTH

LISH wondered, as he drove along, why there were so many men on the road that morning, for in the weeks that he had been up on the Divide he had never seen so many, and all of them were going in the direction of the Canada Hill Mine. They embarrassed him somewhat, and disappointed him, too, because he had hoped, now that the immediate worry over the case of Mrs. Higgins was relieved, to enjoy this ride with Maggie, even though she sat in an unusual silence as they journeyed. He tried to make conversation.

"Bet you don't know what kind of a bird that is up there," he would say, pointing at an ordinary jay. "You don't, eh? Well, he eats insects off'n the trees. I've laid and watched 'em by the hour when they was right busy gettin' their grub. They're the ones that whistle like this!"

He pursed his lips and astonished her by an

exact imitation of the bird's song. He was delighted at getting an answer from some bird back in the forest. "This is the way they call when they're matin'," he went on, with the same simplicity, and again trilled and whistled his plaintive note. "But 'tain't half so fine as that of the oriole. He goes this way, and then she answers him like this."

She had not suspected him of being an ornithologist, and, knowing but little of birdly habits, was interested as he told in homely phraseology of what he had learned. He endowed them with almost human intelligence, with griefs, with joys, with playfulness, and with humor as he spoke of them. He told of the flowers that grew in climes the birds frequented, and again his crudely poetic soul gave to the verdure itself that magic touch of familiar love.

More than ever was she puzzled over the character that she could but half-understand. It seemed to her, as she listened to him, that there were many beauties of life which she had missed; songs that she had not heard, colors that she had not seen, scents that had blown past her unheeded. She had laughed at his crudities and bluntness in those times she had met him, and was rather ashamed of that slight, secret scorn she had enter-

tained, now that a new reverence, wondering, had been awakened.

"We're here," he said, as they came in sight of the red buildings of the mine. "I've talked so much that the way didn't seem very long, Maggie. Sometimes I think I've lived alone in the hills and deserts so much, that all the talk I wanted to turn loose had sort of kept pilin' up, like water behind a dam, until now, when I get a chance, I just naturally gabble like a plain darned fool. Maybe you'd have liked to tell me all about the dinin'-room, down at the hotel. Most people like to talk about their own business, and then everyone else yawns and says, 'What a bore that man is! Talked all the time about his work, when I wanted to talk about mine!'"

Murdock came out and met them with a grateful smile. He, too, looked at the prospector with a different appraisement. That this man could go to the camp and arrange for an attendance that the doctor declared beyond his limitations, and all from a queer humanitarian motive, made him worth while. He sustained a certain added respect for him. He refused to permit Lish to walk back across the two miles, and himself got into the buckboard and handled the reins for the return. The prospector seemed to have lost his

desire to talk when it came to riding with someone other than the waitress, although Murdock tried to induce him to conversation.

"I'm powerful thankful to you, Murdock," he said, when they came to the trail. "It certainly does a man good once in a while to meet a feller that's willin' to give him a lift."

"Give you a lift? Heavens, man! It's you that did something for me. I want to thank you for making that trip to the camp."

"Oh, I didn't do it for you," Lish stated with distressing frankness. "I wa'n't thinkin' about you at all. It was for Mrs. Marthy Higgins. So long."

He turned off into the trail, and then, after he had gone some distance, frowned and stooped over to looked at it closely. For several paces he traveled carefully, scrutinizing places where there was dust, and looking at occasional patches of twisted verdure.

"Looks to me as if there'd been a heap of walkin' done over this in the last few hours!" he exclaimed. "It looks like a procession made by a tribe of Piutes on ration day. Wonder what's up?"

He quickened his steps, although the frown did not leave his face, and he trotted here and there

in his eagerness to cover ground, until, at last, he came in sight of Channel's claim, where nothing unusual could be seen. He shouted as he passed the patriarch's cabin, but, getting no response, hastened on around the bend.

"Great jumpin' Junipers!" he exclaimed, stopping involuntarily on the hillside when he emerged from the woods.

Down below him were at least a score of men arguing and holding a heated controversy. He walked slowly down toward them. They saw him coming, and faced in his direction as if waiting for him to approach.

"What's up?" he asked decisively, staring at them.

They looked from one to the other as if waiting for a spokesman to advance himself, and, as is invariably the case, one did. It was Channel Smith.

"Why, these-here fellers comes a-lopin' up here, and starts in to stakin' ground," quavered the veteran, with indignation. "They're a-gobblin' every foot of ground in the gulch! So they be."

"What on earth for?" demanded Lish, looking blankly at the faces around him.

Someone in front laughed with hoarse ridicule.

"What for?" the man reiterated. "What do

you suppose for? What does a man usually stake ground for? You didn't suppose we were lookin' for a cheese mine, did you? It's ground carryin' pay, in gold."

Lish craned his neck and singled the speaker out. He looked at him with a dangerously pleasant look.

"Never can tell," he answered amiably. "Every man to his taste. A cheese mine mightn't be a bad proposition. Funny I never thought of lookin' for one. A feller can learn somethin' every minute of the day, can't he? They's always somebody around smart enough to teach him."

He smiled so placidly that the sting was taken from his words, but the man who had done the talking carried it farther.

"This gulch ain't been worked much," he declared, "and as far as we can sabe there hasn't been many claims taken that were recorded. So we're goin' in now to straighten it all up. There ain't any use in our fightin' over it, is there, boys?"

He addressed the others impartially, and they seemed glad to agree.

"That's right!" heartily joined in Lish, who had been ignored in that agreement. "That's

just what I sort of expected from men livin' in a camp named Peaceful. No use in fightin' over anything that I ever found, barrin' womenfolks, and they sure do kick up such an awful muss sometimes that you really can't tell whose fault it was. Fix her all up, fellers; but don't quarrel."

He turned and walked through the crowd with his long, swinging steps, and made his way to his tent that was not more than fifty feet distant. He untied the latches with steady hands, and disappeared inside. The spokesman of the crowd began his arguments.

"Now I guess most of this ground here's open," he declared, "and there's — how many are here?"

He counted them aloud.

"Twenty-one men," he declared. "Everybody's staked, some of 'em three or four deep on a claim. It strikes me the best way is for a hat pool with numbers in it. Then, bein' as there is about seven claims on this here gulch, not countin' Channel's, which we've agreed to leave out on account of him workin' it all the time and bein' the discoverer, that makes just three owners on each one. How does that strike you?"

They began instantly to murmur, but were all cut short by an incisive voice from the rear. They

turned. Standing in the tent fly was the prospector.

"Hold on," he drawled. "Sorry, bein' as it don't seem none of my business, to have been overhearin' all you was sayin'. You've made a sort of mistake in your count, you fellers have."

He walked toward them, and stopped when but a bare ten feet distant. Apparently he did so for a purpose.

"I sort of heard, dribbin' through my tent, that there was seven claims on this gulch. Does that take in the one below Channel's? The one that belongs to John Martin?"

"Sure it does," blustered the spokesman. "It's a cinch it wa'n't taken legally."

"Never mind that part of it. I ain't a lawyer," was the prospector's reply. "And how about this claim I'm on?"

"It's just the same. Sorry to have to put you off'n it. Maybe you can fix it up with the owners, whoever draws it."

Lish looked at him pleasantly, and then at the others.

"It does seem right hard the way I have to change bosses all the time," he commented. "And me bein' a real hard-workin' sort. I've done quite a lot of diggin' around here. Ain't

found nothin' yet, except a few colors down on bed rock, and none of 'em big enough to rattle in a pan. Ain't they no way you can fix it up so's to leave this claim alone, same as Channel's?"

The men looked to their self-authorized spokesman to reply, which he did with clear vigor.

"Nope. Besides, what difference does it make to you who you work for? Ain't one man as good as another? You're a stranger here, you see, so you don't care who owns the ground you work, do you? Channel says you've got a lay on this, and that it's Harry Martin's."

The prospector looked at Channel with a curt stare, and then back at the man.

"I sort of think he gave it to you straight on that," he said, "but it does seem to make a difference to me who I work for. I rather like him. We got an agreement that suits us first rate. And as far as his Brother John's ground goes, we ain't none. Only I like him, too, because he's been pretty decent to me. The rest of 'em on this gulch I don't know. That's up to them and you. But I guess you'll have to leave this claim and John Martin's out of the deal."

The men frowned at him, and again left it to the spokesman, who had become bolder.

"You've got nothing at all to say about what

we do," he declared hotly. "You mind your own —"

He stopped short, for there had come a blue flash, and the prospector had taken three or four steps with quick precision. A gun was pointed at his head.

"You talk too much!" Lish snapped at him, and all the whimsical humor had vanished. "Ever since I showed up here you've been shootin' off your mouth. I'm for peace all the time, but I've had too much of it, and, besides, I don't like you anyhow. You don't look straight to me. You get off this ground and take the rest of this bunch with you, and do it quick! If you don't, I'll put five shots in your hide before you can hit the ground! Now get!"

There was scarcely an instant's hesitation. The loud spokesman went suddenly white, and his nerve vanished. He looked to the others for support, but they, too, appeared to have been stricken with a sudden desire to leave. Already one or two men on the outskirts began to move hastily away, calling to others to "Come on! No use in a gun fight!" The spokesman had lost his prestige. He joined a procession that threatened to become a stampede. Lish watched them until they had reached almost the limit of his claim, and then

called to them: "That goes, too, for John Martin's ground. Don't get mixed up in your measurements."

No one replied as they filed away. They halted above the stakes on the claim's boundary, and Lish was still standing there, rigid as a rock, and seemingly as ready for a fight as when he first declared himself. Channel Smith, a picture of senile helplessness, was back of him, with his hands hanging at his sides. The men began to walk away up the gulch by twos and threes, now and then looking back, until they were lost to sight. The prospector turned toward the old man with an impatient gesture, then slipped the gun into his belt, in the absence of a holster.

"This comes," he declared, "of your shootin' off your mouth so much about the prospects you've been findin'. Channel, you're a nice old chap, but, by the great horn spoon, you sure need a nurse!"

The old man looked indignant, but did not answer.

"I reckon you told 'em you thought this ground was all open, eh? Just the same as you did me. All they had to do was to come and get it. Just stick in a few stakes and it was their'n. Why didn't you give it to 'em straight?"

Channel Smith assumed an air of great authority.

"They ain't nobody workin' up here," he declared, with dignity. "The more folks around the more company. I'm a developer, I am. I've got a book down here a feller give me called 'The Rights of Man,' an' it says land hadn't ought to belong to no one what don't dig in it."

He fumbled around for words for a minute and then assumed a stern appearance.

"If you can tell me, David Henley, what business you had a-goin' off this mornin' without sayin' anything to me where you was goin' I'd like to hear it. You're the most peevin' young feller I ever had on my gulch!"

The prospector looked at him for a full half-minute, and then doubled over with laughter.

"Had anything to eat?" he asked irrelevantly.

The ancient's face brightened, and he looked toward the tent expectantly.

"Because if you ain't," Lish added, "I'm thinkin' of warmin' up some beans and openin' a can of tomaters. By that time that gang up the creek'll have cooled off a little, and I'll go up and see what I can do for 'em."

He walked over to his tent, started the fire in

his little camp stove, and prepared the hurried meal, then again, with a grave face, turned to Smith.

"Now," he said, "I want you to sit right down here on this bench I made, and make yourself to home till I come back. If you see that there Jack a-snoopin' around, hand him and Pete this bunch of biscuit. They burned, drat 'em!"

He turned and stalked away up the gulch, while Channel watched him out of sight. Again he was the Mediator. He traversed half the length of the next claim before he came upon the claim jumpers, who were drawing lots.

"Hey, you fellers," he called. "I want to talk to you about three minutes. I'm sorry I had to say what I did back down yonder, but a man has to stick to his principles, if he's any good at all."

He walked toward them all the time he spoke, and halted in front of where they stood expectantly waiting.

"You men came up here to this gulch," he said, "because you heard old Channel Smith had struck it rich. That's so, ain't it?"

Some of them nodded their heads.

"Well, I'm goin' to tell you that he ain't got a thing on earth, as yet. They ain't nobody knows

whether there is a dozen of ounces of gold in the whole blamed gulch."

Some of them ripped out oaths of disappointment, and others looked sheepishly at him. One of the men laughed and said, "I was afraid of that."

"Now, boys, there ain't no use in bein' sore at Channel Smith," the prospector went on. "He's a fine old feller, but he's right old. He talks a heap too much, and I'm sort of afraid he brags a little — just a little — now and then. If you don't believe what I'm tellin' you come on back and have a talk with him and look at his ground."

He waited for this to sink home, then said: "I was right hasty down there, this mornin', but we'll forget all about that. I'm here lookin' after my friends' property, and I'll sort of keep on doin' it; but as far as anybody's gone, it ain't worth fightin' over. Anyhow, you all have jumped these other claims. The law'll tell you, when you get done, who the ground belongs to, and until then, if I was you, I'd drop it. I'm witness. If anybody else tries to come on to this gulch, I'll tell 'em so. Now suppose you come down and look at Channel's and my ground."

He waited patiently at the side while they

argued the situation over among themselves, and was gratified when his adherents won the day. He led them back down the trail, and pointed to his own trenches and prospect holes.

"Anybody that wants to try a pan or so down there's welcome," he invited, but they did not accept. Channel Smith, peacefully asleep on the bench in front of the tent, awoke and got to his feet.

"Channel," Lish called, "I'm goin' to take the boys down to your ground. Come over here a minute."

The patriarch got slowly to his feet, rubbed his eyes, stroked his beard, and doddered across the intervening space.

"Now suppose you tell us, straight, the biggest pan you have had," Lish suggested.

The old man swelled with importance.

"Oncet I got a pan what run forty cents," he declared. "That was nigh on to twenty year ago. This is mighty good ground."

"But what did you get since then? Give us the truth," demanded one of the jumpers.

"I was a-pannin' down there one day, right by that clump of pussy willers, when I got some right-good dirt," Channel answered, growing more enthusiastic, "and says I, 'Channel, this is a great

claim! She's good whenever you get that pay streak,' says I. And then, over by that big yeller rock you may have seen, I found some more dirt, and says I to myself, says I —"

"But what did the pans show, Channel?" patiently interrupted the prospector, while the others listened intently.

"Rightly good prospects; but, of course, they wa'n't in the pay, and —"

"But how much did the pans go?" insisted Lish. "In cents I mean."

The old man shook his head, and started to go on with flamboyant predictions.

"You weighed 'em, Channel," the prospector remarked. "I know that! You weigh everything. Your scales is most worn out from overwork. Now just what was the biggest pan you ever got besides that forty-cents one?"

The old man hesitated, and looked embarrassed.

"Just what did they weigh, Channel?" Lish went on. "You'd tell me, wouldn't you?"

Channel Smith warmed to the appeal, and relapsed into plain truth.

"The biggest I got were three cents," he admitted. "But you see how it is, they ain't no —"

A roar of laughter interrupted him, and the

claim-jumpers turned toward one another with much amusement. Even the patriarch's indignation was drowned in their comment. The prospector waited until it had died away.

"I don't want you men to think that the ground ain't good," he said, when his opportunity came. "If I didn't think so I wouldn't be here workin' on it; but it's just promisin', that's all. And anyhow, there ain't much of anything in the world worth fightin' over, except the square thing. Ain't I right?"

Now that their passions were cooled, they looked at him and had to admit that he had merely stated truth.

"By jingoes, you are!" declared the man who had been the spokesman of the forenoon. "If we hadn't been so cocksure, we could have saved a whole lot of fuss. I'm for you, Henley. And when you say you'll see they won't nobody else come up here and stake till we find out about these titles, it goes for me."

Lish looked at him and grinned shyly at the compliment.

"It sort of seems to me," one other man declared, just before they moved down the gulch, "that he's right able to stand for anything he starts in to do," and then, with another laugh at their

own expense, and sad shakes of their heads at Channel Smith, they turned out into the trail.

Lish turned toward the patriarch with a sly look.

"Channel," he said, "this has sure been a lesson to me to keep my mouth shut! The trouble with me is I do too much talkin'."

And Channel Smith, with a great air of reproval, said: "Son, you sure do! You sure do! That's the only fault I got to find with you; but when you get older, like me, you'll never say nothin' about it to nobody when you've struck it rich. And, by the way, them tomaters was singed just a leetle bit! Try not to singe 'em to-night when I come for dinner, son."

Thus, having invited himself to dinner and administered a rebuke, the ancient plodded down the trail to his work, leaving the prospector to speculate on the advantage of always sustaining a peaceful disposition, and keeping a gun handy to do it with.

CHAPTER XV

"PARDNERS"

"IT just does seem," said the prospector to himself, as he dumped a pan of potato peelings outside his tent on the following afternoon, "as if they ain't no way for me to get shed of that old cuss Channel, except to kill him. I moved out of his blamed cabin, and he's just as good as moved up here. He's not lost a meal since I moved, and he don't rush up and volunteer any grub. All I got for movin' was a chance to live in a tent and have a free-for-all boarder!"

He heard voices back of him coming down the trail, and readily distinguished the high notes of Channel, who was talking volubly.

"I says to 'em, says I, 'You fellers gota get off'n my gulch. If you don't I'll sick Lish Henley on you.' An' they didn't go for to go. Then I says to Lish, 'Come here, son, an' just naturally kick this scum of the earth off'n this-here mountain!' He minds me right well, and between us

we sent 'em all off about their business, we did! "

The prospector stared around the corner of the tent and saw that with the voluble old man were three others, whom he recognized as the Martin brothers and Murdock, superintendent of the Canada Hill. He advanced farther, shouted " Hello! " and stood with his empty dishpan in his hand to receive them.

It was the claim-owner who reached him first.

" Henley," he said, " news travels pretty fast up these hills, and I've come over to thank you. There ain't much to say, but I want to remark that you're all man."

His brother came forward more slowly, while Murdock awaited his turn.

" I don't know that I've ever done anything for you," John Martin said, in his quiet way, " but you undoubtedly stood for me. No man ever lost anything by it."

" Done for me? " Lish said. " Why say, you offered me a job."

" And it is always open," was the concise answer.

Murdock shook hands.

" Bully boy! " he exclaimed. " Those fellows haven't got a chance. This land is all patented; but they might make considerable trouble if they

go at it hard enough. The Martins wanted to come over and thank you, so I came along."

Apparently the prospector had dismissed all thought of the claim-jumping from his mind. His first question proved it.

"How's Mrs. Marthy Higgins?" he asked. "Is — is — is her tongue coated?" His solicitude and evident desire to appear respectful, robbed his question of anything but a homely meaning. "My mammy used to always look at my tongue first," he went on, with great earnestness. "You see if it's in good shape, 'most always you ain't bad-tempered, and sooner or later you'll get all right. I reckon if somebody could find how to keep folks from havin' bilious tongues this would be a heap happier world. You say she seems on the mend? That's good, ain't it!"

He looked guilelessly into the eyes of Murdock and ignored the others.

"Well, we think it's pretty good," replied Murdock. "She seems to be getting along better now that she has that girl from down at the hotel to look after her."

Strangely enough, the prospector was silent in this pass. He studied the ends of his fingers, and looked down at the trenches. The claim-owner spoke to him.

" If there's anything you want over here, Henley," he said, " ask me for it."

" I got everything, except I'd like some canned tripe. I'll pay for it."

Harry Martin pulled out his book and made a memorandum.

" Now there's another thing, Henley," he said, " that I'd like to say to you. It strikes me I'm getting the best of this deal. I've got a new offer for you. I want you to take a half-ownership in this claim, and I'll furnish all the working supplies."

" Thanks," was all the prospector said, thus laconically accepting the gift.

" Well, ain't you goin' to thank him more'n that for us? " Channel Smith, who had been fidgeting around the borders of the group, asked.

" What do you want me to do — give it back to him, or hand him a lock of my hair? " Lish demanded, and Channel subsided. Apparently he thought of nothing further to say, aside from work. " Since you've taken me in pardnership," he said to Harry Martin, " I'll show you what my idea is, so's you won't be wonderin' why I've come clean over here to the side of the gulch to begin sinkin' again. Come here."

They left the others behind, and walked across to the new work.

"There was a right-smart slip here on this bank, some time," Lish asserted, pointing around at the physical characteristics of the hillside. "I sort of calculate it came after the gold was deposited. It's back under the hill there a piece, if I'm right. I've done a lot of minin' one time and another, and I got an idea, Martin, that if there's anything in the gulch it's there. Now about this pardnership business, what I want to say is this: If there's anything there at all, it's most likely pretty rich. I took this lay here because I liked the chances of makin' somethin', and because I can't be a loafer. Not because I was busted. I've a little money. Enough to keep on prospectin' for some time to come. So if you give me half because you think I'm broke, you don't need to do it. I'm satisfied with the lay,-and I don't want you to do anything you'd be sorry for if we hit it strong."

At this evidence of fairness Harry Martin looked at him with a graver interest.

Accustomed, as he was, to dealing with men, he had encountered few who would have carried the point to such an extreme.

"Henley," he said, "I'm much obliged to you

for this talk; but it doesn't lessen my determination, and it makes me hope, more than ever, that you'll succeed. It rather makes me more certain that you bear no ill will for — well — for that first meeting of ours."

Lish looked troubled for a moment, then grinned.

"Say," he said, "I'm right sorry for that. I'm one of these fellers that has to fight himself all the time. I was one of these poor cusses born with real nasty tempers. Things wa'n't very easy for me when I was a little shaver. They used to pick on me because I was a runt. I never wanted to fight. I just had to. I had a wonderful mammy. She used to go to church 'most every Sunday, and take me along. My daddy was a packer. He drank too much. He knew hosses, and men, and how to fight. The three of 'em got him in the end, and I was the man of the house. I learned pretty soon that if I wanted to get anywhere, I'd just naturally have to fight for it. So I fought. Then maw died, and for a long time it looked as if hosses, and whisky, and men that were no account'd get me, the same as they did dad, until one day I took a tumble. It was in a calaboose down in a little jim-crow town in Mexico, that I had time to think it over. Since then I've

always let whisky alone, and been just plain friends with hosses, and done all a feller could to cultivate a peaceful spirit. I come here to this camp to stay. I ain't picked no trouble with any man. But it does seem as if everybody was tryin' to make me lose my temper, and you was one of 'em. They's a wallop comin' to you, now that we're pardners. You've been right decent with me, particularly about this claim business, and so, if you want to, you can lam me just as hard as I did you that day, and I won't do nothin', and then we'll be quits. I ain't sure that I wouldn't rather like to have you to do it, so we can start even again. Let her go!"

He stood with his arms hanging loosely at his sides, and his face turned full toward Harry Martin, as if waiting for a blow that should be unreturned; but Martin only reached over and, with a bellowing laugh, slapped him on the shoulder.

"We're even anyhow," he declared. "And I hope, for both of us, that you find something under the hill. If you don't, I own other ground, and you can tackle some of it on the same terms."

With which charitable arrangement he turned back across the gulch, with Lish meekly following.

Channel Smith was still entertaining the other

visitors with accounts of the pans of dirt he had taken from the gulch, and, overhearing him as they approached, Lish learned for the first time that the pans were steadily rising in value, and had now reached a worth of two dollars and forty cents. It did seem as if the old man must have found something, some time; but his hearers were leading him on by easy steps to greater exaggeration, and laughing at his lack of memory. They departed before the prospector had a chance to say anything, and then he turned on the Forty-niner and said to him: "Channel, you and me's got to quit lyin' about this ground of ours, now that we're both owners on this gulch. Lyin' ain't no good. You and me's done too much of it. We've done our share. After this let's try tellin' the truth for a while."

Before Channel could end his vociferous and indignant denial that he had ever stretched the truth, the prospector had started across the gulch to his new work, with a feeling that it was quite a fair world, and that, perhaps, there was something under the hill worth having. Channel, angered by the broad back turned toward him, plodded down the gulch toward his own claim, still expressing doubts of the value of "this-here risin' generation."

Quite steadily the prospector worked throughout the day, and when evening came, to Channel's disgust, announced his intention to walk across to the Canada Hill and see how Mrs. Higgins progressed in her illness.

"Well," grumbled the old man, "I s'pose I'll have to go."

"I didn't ask you," said Lish, wishing no words.

"Yes, but I reckon you'd feel hurt if I didn't go 'long to kind of take care of you."

"Oh, I think I'll make it all right alone."

"But I'm sort of afraid you'd be lonesome without company."

"Nope. I won't be lonesome."

"Besides, I don't approve much of boys runnin' around late at nights without some of their elders with 'em. Every boy orter be in bed by nine at night. That's always been the way I sized it up."

The prospector looked at the veteran despairingly. He forgot his determination of the day to do no more prevaricating.

"All right," he said, with an assumption of acquiescence. "I reckon you're right. Only I think a workin'man's better off if he goes to bed with the chickens, and birds, and other fool things. I'll just turn in now."

Channel, who had settled himself for a comfortable smoke, after superintending the washing of the dishes, complaining of the way the beans were cooked, and suggesting various improvements, was highly aggrieved.

"It ain't good for young people to go to bed too early," he declared petulantly. "They oversleeps, and then they grows too much. Gets to be big, long, lanky gawks. That's one thing that's the matter with me. Went to bed too early when I were a boy. 'Never go to bed before nine,' old Benjamin Franklin said, 'then you'll be healthy, busted, and smart.' He was right, that old feller was."

He looked around behind him at a certain slipping of the battered canvas of the tent, to observe that the fly was being tied from inside, and held his pipe in his hand, his mouth open, and his shoulders bent forward.

"Good-night, old feller!" a voice came from within the tent.

He sat and smoked for a minute, then talked complainingly to himself, quavering his woes to the dusk. After a time, as the stars began to appear dimly through the twilight, he got stiffly up and walked to the tent fly. He pulled open one of the latches, and looked inside. The rear end

of Mr. Henley's tent had mysteriously become unpegged, leaving a gaping hole beneath, and was quite empty.

The old man looked, agape, for an instant, then quivered with rage.

"Well, drat his imperdence!" he shouted, shaking a fist through the aperture. "For two cents I'd lambast him when he gets home. He's got to move back to that there cabin again, where I can keep an eye on him. The idea of such goin's on! Right here on my gulch, too!"

He trudged off down the trail, and even at that moment David Elisha Henley, two miles away, was inquiring solicitously concerning the health of Mrs. Higgins, and grinning at Maggie.

"The doctor says she's better to-day," Maggie announced; "but that she'll be sick maybe for some time. It looks like typhoid, and Murdock has been going after everybody about the water, and doing all sorts of things. Had half the day shift working above ground to clean things up, and says he'll throw anybody out that leaves garbage or rubbish anywhere around their cabins. But the doctor says Mrs. Higgins ought to pull through."

"All right," said Lish. "Now I've got that over with, Maggie, I thought I'd like to talk to

you." And he did. For two hours he sat there, outside the cabin, trying to prove himself a conversationalist, interrupted now and then by the demands of the patient, and all the time exposing new traits of character that puzzled the girl who had previously met no one like him.

"I'll be over every evenin'," he announced, when he took his departure. She bade him good night as if he were an old and familiar acquaintance, and he trudged homeward in the new moonlight, philosophically wondering whether Channel Smith would be found asleep on the bench in front of his tent.

On the night following Channel declared it his firm conviction that he had been scurvily treated.

"In the fust place," he said oracularly, "it was me what introduced you into good society over there. Secondly, I knowed Miss Higgins before you did, and it ain't proper for you to be gallivantin' over there without me. Third, it's a showin' disrespect for your elders to go to bed and leave 'em sittin' outside. Where in the name of common sense was you dragged up anyhow, not to know better manners?"

The replies of Lish did not appear to satisfy Mr. Smith.

"You just better pack your things to-morrer," he declared, "and move down to the cabin. I won't stand for such goin's on!"

In his indignation he forgot to tarry that evening, and the prospector made his start without interruption. He was not to have an evening with Maggie alone, however, for he found Murdock there when he arrived. They sat and talked, like old friends, and Maggie listened. The mine superintendent was angry because the news had come across the Divide that a stage had been held up, the fourth in three months, and the express looted. He suggested that the company ought to have a man of Henley's quickness to protect it; but Lish shook his head and declared that he was too peaceful for that sort of work; that whenever he heard of a fight, he usually ran in the opposite direction; that all he was looking for was the pursuit of happiness guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence.

On the following night he found Channel Smith there before he arrived, and was compelled to listen to the old man's garrulity for an hour, although, with Maggie quite close by his side, he succeeded in holding a few whispered sentences with her. That she agreed with him in regarding the Forty-niner as being something of an un-

wanted guest soothed his spirit, and made him pleasant to that person on the homeward route.

And thus, for a week, he worked by days, and visited by nights. It was just seven days after he had become a partner in the claim that anyone standing on the bank above him would have discerned a trace of excitement in his manner as he carried a pan of red dirt down to the edge of the creek, where he had hollowed out a little cove to still the brawling current. He squatted down and let the water run over the submerged edge of the gold pan, and then thrust his hands deep into the mud and worked it, friable, between his fingers. A red stream smirched the clear waters of the creek, and was lost in the eddies, as it hurried busily down the gulch.

The sun was dropping out over the westward trees of the glade as he swirled the pan and worked its contents finer and finer, and threw to one side the gravel that encumbered it. Now the pan swung gently, sidewise, tilted to the angle taught by long experience. The water was not so freely admitted. He ran the little swinging stream of black sand slowly around the channel. He gave a sudden intake of breath, quick and jubilant, and, seasoned as he was, there was ex-

citement in his manner as he watched; for trailing heavily along after the black rivulet resting in the moisture, ran a stream of slow-moving yellow — the soft, warm yellow that comes from virgin gold.

He straightened up and repressed a desire to shout, to throw his hat, to jump up and down. He had struck the edge of a pay streak, and knew it. His conjectures promised to come true. He hurried over to the tent and got an old tomato can from the little heap outside, rushed back to the stream, washed it out with due care, and dumped the little trail of gold into it.

"Twenty or thirty cents there, if I know anything about it!" he declared aloud, as he ran back up to his pit and dropped into it. He threw aside a few more shovelfuls of earth, and scratched closely on the bed rock, stopping now and then to inspect it as he did so, but in the dust of ages it refused to show the gleam. This time, down by the creek border, he found it harder to suppress himself, for in the last of the pan's yielding he found coarse gold. He stood with the pan in his hand for a moment, then threw it off on the side, and looked down the gulch.

"I want to tell Channel," he said to himself, "but if I haven't got a real bunch of pay, the old

codger would be so fussed up and disappointed, I reckon he'd never get over it. Nope! Guess I'll wait a day or two. The only one I'll tell will be Maggie, or my pardner, if I come across him. But say, David Elisha Henley! It does look as if things were comin' your way, and that you've got a piece of ground that might make you pretty comfortable for the rest of your born days!"

He worked until later than usual, with all the zest that a man gives when he has something to work for, and the stake is large, and every shovel of dirt promises to bring him to wealth. He experienced that thrill that never wears out, of finding a pay streak whose richness can be no more than conjecture, but which holds all the allurement of possibility. He threw the dirt carefully to one side in a new dump, and sometimes scanned each shovelful before heaving it upward. He hummed jubilant songs, and did not heed the sweat that trickled from his face in his hurried effort.

When he heard an annoyed shout from across the gulch, he had again to wrestle with a desire to break the news of his find to the old man who had been the means of bringing him to the gulch; but with that thankful thought, he laid down his shovel gladly and washed himself in the stream

after shouting: "Comin'! Be there in a minute. Didn't think it was so late!"

Usually he grumbled somewhat, in a whimsical way, because Channel had come to take it for granted that he was to get his meals at the tent; but to-night he went in a more complaisant spirit, and "spread himself" on the meal. He opened cans of every variety. He got out a clean salt sack for a table spread. He gave the plates an extra swabbing, so that they might shine. He was jocose in his manner.

The old man looked at him rather wistfully, as if there was something of youth about him that he envied. He, too, had worked hard, and was tired. It was with extreme reluctance that the prospector at last told him he was going over to the Canada Hill that night, and wanted to go alone. There was not the usual outburst. Channel sat and hung his head, and was silent.

"You don't mind, do you, Channel?" Lish asked, suddenly smitten in the conscience by the veteran's dejection.

"It don't seem to make much difference whether I does or doesn't," Channel replied, and then, with something approaching a break in his voice, added: "Son, I'm gettin' old. I didn't take time to think about it till the last day or so. No-

body seems cryin' very hard to have me around any more. You're a-tryin' to get rid of me. I suspected it the other night when you run off that-a-way."

Lish had to grin to himself at this remarkable display of acumen. Channel was really beginning to suspect there were times when he was not wanted. And so, again, Lish benevolently lied:

"Want you? Sure I want you! But I got to go in such a hurry to-night, that I'm goin' to hit the trail hard, and I sort of thought maybe you'd be too tired after such a hard day's work to want to go. You won't be lonesome, will you?"

Channel was forced to admit that he would be lonesome, also that he was not too tired to go if he thought he could be of any use. In fact, he threatened to go just to show the rising generation that he was just as good a man, when it came to hiking, as any of them; but in the end he decided, perhaps, it would be better if he went down to his cabin and patched some overalls that had lacked attention since Mrs. Higgins had been taken ill.

Lish had not seemed to be in "such an all-fired hurry," nevertheless, when he took his way down the road. He observed with satisfaction that the moon was beginning to assume a larger rotundity,

and was in quite a whirl of general delight. He fancied to himself the joy that Channel would feel when told that the gulch had been proven good, and that the pay was merely on the side which had not been prospected. Channel could come up to the upper end of his claim and pick it up without delay. Harry Martin would be happy because it would add to his riches. His brother would be happy for the same reason, and Lish himself would be happiest of all for having been the bearer of such good news. Peaceful Hill seemed to be all that was desirable, after all.

He found Maggie, in a contented frame of mind; for Mrs. Higgins was improving, the doctor felt more confident, and the proprietor of the hotel had told Murdock that they were getting along all right, and that the Widow Callahan had not spilled a bowl of soup on anyone for three whole days. So, with this report of improvement all along the line, Lish proceeded to take Maggie into his confidence.

"First thing I want to tell you is this," he said. "It's about Mrs. Marthy. Did you ever hear her mention anything about a feller named Bill?"

Maggie frowned thoughtfully, and shook her head. Lish appeared genuinely distressed.

"I sort of hoped while she was a-ravin', and tearin', in deleerium tremens, or whatever kind they have with this-here typhoid, she'd recollect somethin' about Bill," he said dolefully.

"Come to think of it, she talks a heap about Willie," Maggie said.

Lish slapped his knee. "That's him! Don't you see? That's him. She's a-callin' that big mucker Bill, Willie. That shows how much she loves him. Willie's her name for him. Everybody else calls him Bill, unless they've got it in for him for somethin' or another, then they call him somethin' else. I tell you, Marthy likes that feller yet, and we'll sure get 'em together again."

Maggie turned and stared at him. He remembered, for the first time, that he had not told her who Willie was.

"Bill Higgins is her man," he said. "He's one of the finest fellers that ever walked in gum boots. He's a great big feller, and everybody liked him till he took to fondlin' and caressin' old Mister Bourbon too much; then he turned into a rip-roarin', rip-snortin', rip-shootin', hell-bent-for-leather sort of a pest. I had to shoot him once myself."

The girl shrank away from him a trifle, and edged farther over on the bench at this matter-

of-fact assertion. He hastened to correct his bad impression.

" Just as friends, you understand. Not wantin' to kill him, nor nothin' like that. ' Just a friendly sort of a shot what punctured his right shoulder and put him plumb out of business for a while."

He looked at her appealingly, and she said: " Well, then what? "

" Why, you see, that was after him and Marthy had split up. He got so bad she had to shed him. Then, after I'd pinked him, I used to go round to the hospital and sit with him just for company. He was sure some sick man. Then one day, bein' sort of weak, he lets loose and tells me all about Marthy, and how she was the best woman that ever lived, and that if she'd been there they wouldn't be no need for a nurse to come around and maul his shoulder every time they fixed the bandages. ' She was that tender,' says Bill, blubberin' like a kid, ' that she could take my boots off when I was only half-shot without wakin' me up.' Then he'd say: ' At last I got to be too rotten for such a angel to mix with, so she up and hiked, an' since then I ain't been the same man. I've been worser.' "

He stopped to roll a cigarette, and did not seem to observe that Maggie had again come closer.

He took three or four puffs, and continued his tale.

"I see he was all broke up over this woman, and I was sorry for him. I've always been a sympathetic, soft-hearted sort of a cuss. 'Bill,' says I, 'you make me feel orful bad. When I hear the way you treated that nice woman, I'm right sorry I didn't shoot the top of your head off so's to put you out of your misery. I reckon I'll have to do it yet, because I'll just naturally keep hankerin' to do it until some day I'll get my nerve up and do it right.' That didn't seem to make him feel better. Some men are real ungrateful."

He turned toward her so that she could see his mild face, and lowered his voice to an awe-struck mumble.

"Would you believe it?" he asked. "That feller, Bill Higgins, come out of the hospital and went to work! Yes, sir, went right to work! And he ain't touched a drop of anything in goin' on two years, and he's such a good miner that now he's bossin' a whole bunch of men, and him and me's just as good friends as ever you saw. He wanted me to stay and work with him, but I ain't much of a man for havin' any bosses around, so I told him I guessed I'd have to hike. Well, he'd

found out some way that his wife was over here in Peaceful, and he was just eatin' his heart out for her. I tried to get him to write again, but he said he'd done her so much dirt, and made so many promises, and busted 'em all, that he was ashamed of hisself, and that it wouldn't do no good. 'They ain't nobody in the world could make Marthy believe I've quit boozin', and am tryin' to do the right thing,' he'd say when we'd be talkin' in the evenin's, like this. And I gathered they'd been right happy when they was first married, and Bill was just a plain roughneck, workin' along and tryin' to get ahead. So, when I left, I didn't tell him where I was comin'. I wanted to get Marthy to give him another show. He'd make mighty good now, and she'd forget all about the rip-snortin' Bill. He'd just be Willie again. And there ain't nothin' finer in this old world than bein' just Willie to some good woman like Marthy Higgins."

He sat quietly for a minute, and then, as if by afterthought, added, with considerable pathos in his voice: "And they ain't no woman can beat her makin' dried-apple pies, is there?"

"Well, why doesn't the fool write?" Maggie exclaimed, ignoring Lish's last question. "I'm sure if he was any good he'd take a chance. Ask-

ing a woman once and then getting scared to try again is no good."

The prospector shook his head.

"That ain't the way to do it," he declared. "The best way is for you to just keep makin' Marthy think of him till she wants him; then, when she does that, we'll up and send for him."

"Perhaps that is better," she assented slowly, with feminine intuition.

They sat for some minutes on the bench in silence, and then he abruptly turned toward her again.

"Now about me," he said. "I've got somethin' to tell you, Maggie. I've struck what looks like pay over there on the gulch. It's sure promisin' ground. It's a cinch it'll make me about all the money I need if it's what I think it is."

He had to wait until her joy had subsided, which he did with quiet patience.

"And what I wanted to say, Maggie, was this," he went on, in the same quiet voice. "If that ground shows up right, you'd be sort of willin' to marry me, wouldn't you?"

He could not see that her face had flushed for an instant, and that her fingers locked themselves together, and then, with quick change, unlocked,

and that a dull indignation overrode the happiness of his proposal. She jumped to her feet.

"What made you say that?" she demanded. "Do you think your striking pay would make me marry you? Humph! I've had a dozen chances to marry men with mines on this Divide! No, I won't marry you."

He sat and twisted his hat for a moment, then looked helplessly up at her.

"Well, what can I do to make you marry me, Maggie?" he asked, in a forlorn tone. "I sure want you right bad. I been lookin' for you ever since I was born. I've asked you more'n once. Don't you reckon I'll get money enough out of that claim to do for the two of us?"

She did not answer, but stood looking off toward the path of white, where the moon reflected its rays across perpetual snows. He did not understand that she longed for him, and that nothing save the unfortunate reference to possible money had prevented her from gladly saying "Yes." He did not appreciate that she stood there waiting for him to correct his error. He showed no sign of emotion, and lost his opportunity.

"Well," he said, "I s'pose I'm a sucker for wantin' to marry a real lady like you, Maggie.

And you really don't need me, anyhow, because that's a right good job you got down there at the hotel."

He sighed wearily, and got to his feet. He brightened up.

" You keep on talkin' to Mrs. Marthy," he said. " You and me'll patch that up yet. And just because you won't marry me won't keep me from comin' over here to see you. I'll be moseyin' along now, I guess."

He waited for her to say something more, but she stood hoping that he would alter his form of proposal, and insist on a further hearing. It was so unlike all she knew of him that he should so quietly surrender any cause he undertook. She could not comprehend that of all the battles of his life, this was the one in which he felt most impotent; that while he might face Big Bill's gang with unflinching determination, he felt a great hopelessness in this quest of love where the game was played differently from any wherein he had participated.

" Good night, Maggie," he said. " Hope you ain't got no hard feelin's."

He turned and had taken several steps before she could speak, and it seemed to the girl who had nothing but the dreary outlook of forever " wait-

ing on table" at the Peaceful Hill Inn that all of life was slipping away from her.

"I'll try and get off and come over to-morrow afternoon and see your claim," she called, hoping that her words would furnish sufficient excuse for him to come back and renew his suit; but to him that was but a natural curiosity expressed, and he did not stop.

"All right," he called over his shoulder in the same leaden, matter-of-fact voice. "I'd be right glad to show you all there is to see. Do come!" And before his last words had been finished he was tramping away with his quick stride. She watched him until he had turned away through the little colony of dark buildings, whose sordid, workaday appearance had been painted into something of mystic beauty by the night, and then troubled at heart, and admitting to herself that she loved him, went into the room where lay her patient.

The prospector saw a light in the superintendent's cottage, and halted a moment, irresolute, then turned toward it. He rapped on the door, and, when told to "come in," stepped across the threshold.

"Murdock," he said, "if you can get word to Harry Martin to-morrow, tell him I want to see

him. I've struck the edge of pay on our claim."

He would have gone out in that same phlegmatic way, but the superintendent jumped to his feet and called him back to ask questions and offer congratulations.

"I'll see Harry early in the morning," he declared. "It's good news for him. I'll bring him over in the buckboard."

"All right," said Lish, again starting out. "And, by the way," he added, turning back, "if Maggie wants to come, you'll bring her too, won't you?"

Murdock grinned softly, said "Yes," and watched him trudge away. Then, when he saw the prospector turning into the hill trail, he laughed softly and said to himself, "That's the way of it, eh?" and whistled softly as he prepared for bed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRST PAN OF GOLD

WHEN Channel Smith decided that it would be far better for him again to get up early and go to the claim above for his breakfast, just to be neighborly, and also to save the trouble of cooking his own, he thought probably he would have to arouse the prospector; but from that gentleman's stove-pipe, smoke, old smoke, was issuing in a volume, and inside the tent, on the top of his grub box, Lish was painfully finishing a letter which had been conceived after a night's deliberation. It was addressed to Bill Higgins, and read:

DEAR BILL: Youre old woman mighty nigh croaked with typhode but shes mendin. shes been sickern a mule what eats loco weed and shes been a yellin her head off for her willie. now you big slob if you want to show youve got any paydirt in you and aint all just plain mud come on over to Peaceful Hill camp and get her sos she wont go on thinkin you are a plain onery booze fittin bum. youll find her at a mine called the canady hill and then its up to you to make good. Hopin this finds you well and lettin you know Im enjoyin the same good health, I remain yourse respectfuly,

DAVID ELISHA HENLEY.

He licked the edge of the envelope as Channel entered, and grinned at him thoughtfully.

"Right glad you come over," he said, as he laid the envelope on top of a baking-powder can so that its constant presence would remind him to mail it. "Kind of thought you'd come. After I have a snack I'll show you somethin'."

"Ain't you got no breakfast yet?" demanded the Forty-niner, frowning at him from under his thatch of gray eyebrows. "Of all the lazy fellers ever I see, you are the beatinest! Make my coffee right strong this mornin', will you? I feel sort of weak."

Lish looked at him in amazement for an instant. He surmised from Channel's words that in the future he would have him as a regular guest to breakfast, as well as the other two meals of the day, but grinned good-naturedly. After all he thought, it was not much more work to cook for two than one; with which philosophical viewpoint he began slicing bacon from the slab that hung from the ridgepole. Moreover, he was already enjoying, in anticipation, the breaking of the good news to the patriarch; for now he felt that it could not be concealed, inasmuch as the old man would certainly follow Murdock and Martin up the gulch when they came, and might, if fate smiled

kindly, also have the presence of Maggie to whet his curiosity.

"Come over here with me," he said, after the breakfast had been disposed of. "Don't go rushin' back to your work until I show you somethin'."

"Want my advice, do you?" Channel asked. "I knew that sooner or later you'd come to one that knows all about minin'. I sort of reckoned you couldn't get along without me. That's the way it uster be in forty-nine! Some smart Aleck would try to open up his ground his own way, and then, when he'd got plumb discouraged, he'd come around to me and ask how it orter be done. Sometimes I wouldn't tell 'em; but seein' as you're a right-likely young feller, son, I'll go over and look at her."

Lish followed him with a great air of deference as he tramped across the gulch.

"Over there, where I'm workin' now," the prospector said, indicating the place.

"Now suppose you get down in the hole there and take a pan of dirt, and see what you think of it," he suggested, when they stood on the bank above.

With a great air of importance Channel descended, got down on his hands and knees, dug his

skinny, trembling old hands into the loose gravel, clawed away from the top of the bed rock until he had a pan nearly filled, then handed it up to Lish.

"Here," he said, "take that and hold it careful-like, till I come up and work it. Maybe you don't know how to pan dirt when you get it."

Down at the creekside Lish watched him with a quiet, contented grin, as the mud cleared away and the sand began to show. Suddenly Channel began to swirl more excitedly, until the water was rippled and disturbed to its depths. Then he leaned farther over and appeared to have almost lost his grip on the pan. He steadied himself with a visible effort, and laid his hat to one side, and again began moving the pan gently. At last he got up and, with a whoop, held it toward the prospector.

"There," he declared. "That's a big pan. I told you I'd find pay sooner or later on this here gulch of mine. You was all right! All you needed was somebody that knew how to come over and show you, son. The pay's right up yonder, under the edge of that slide. I always sort of reckoned it'd be on that side of the stream, and sort of calculated I'd come over to this side some day and find it!"

He danced up and down clumsily, and with a

great pride. He felt that he had added another conquest to his battle with the hills, and that life was worth living, after all. He glowed with benevolence, and affection, and self-satisfaction at having led Lish to this discovery.

"Pshaw!" he said. "I might of knowed you'd work right into the pay without knowin' it. It's really my fault. I orter taken time to help you out, and show you how, long before this."

"Thank you, Channel," said Lish meekly. "You certainly are a wonder."

In his excitement the discoverer of the gulch put in hours panning and supervising the work, which happened to be on the same lines originally laid out by the prospector. Every foot of advance verified the richness of the ground. It was rendered certain that if the pay streak had any continuity, the owners of some claims at least on the gulch were beyond want.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded Channel, who had been perched above the prospector. "There's two men over there by your tent, and what looks like a female woman!"

Lish hurriedly climbed out and rushed toward them with mingled emotions. That Maggie had come to visit him was in itself a hopeful sign; but more than that, he would now be able to say more

emphatically that the prospect was good. He distanced Channel and gained the visitors first.

"Say," he said, "don't let Channel Smith know you knew anything about the pay. He thinks he found it this mornin', and it makes him feel so perky and fine that I'd rather you just let on to him that you're some surprised. Come on over."

Channel was hurrying to meet them, and, before they were within earshot, had begun to expatiate on his discovery. He handed a pan to Martin and said: "Take a pan for yourself, and see what you think of my gulch!"

He stood around, and boasted, and patronized them all, in the exciting moment when the gold began to show in the trail of the black sand, and even went so far as to again proffer his services to Murdock whenever the superintendent of the Canada Hill felt that he needed expert advice. He gallantly presented the first pan of gold to Maggie, assuring her that there was plenty more where that came from, and threatened to give her an interest in the claim, regardless of the fact that he owned no part of it.

Martin could not forego expressing his elation, and did it by pounding the prospector on the back.

"The thing I'm gladdest of," he declared, "is that I made you accept half of this claim the other

day, Lish. You're a partner worth having. But it doesn't seem fair, even yet. I haven't done my share."

The prospector stood and beamed at him, and was satisfied. Maggie hoped he would say something personal to her, but his conversation was limited to an explanation of theory, and contained no intimate allusion. He did not comprehend that the discovery meant less to her than the desire that he would speak to her on matters nearer the heart. She looked back at him as he lifted her into the buckboard, down at the trail's end, and he thought she waited for him to speak. He did.

"Don't forget that thing about Bill Higgins," he muttered almost in her ear. "Be sure and try to get Marthy so she'll want him. Bill's too good a feller to be goin' around eatin' out a lonesome heart. So long!"

Channel was waiting for him in front of the cabin when he climbed back up the gulch.

"Say, son," he hailed, "s'pose you come over with me to the upper end of my ground. Not that I need your advice, but maybe your eyes is better than mine, and you can see where the slope runs. I orter go to openin' up my own ground now that I got you on the right track."

And obligingly, delicately, the prospector took the Forty-niner to the place that seemed to him the most likely for beginning operations, and threw the first shovelful of earth. He went on up to his own work, and plunged into it with renewed effort; but for some reason a part of the zest was gone. His mind would dwell on Maggie, and the apparent futility of having a paying claim without her to share his joy of possession. He stopped now and then to rest, and to whistle at an impudent bird that watched him from the bough of a stunted tree up on the side of the hill. His only joy was in the fact that old Channel Smith, for whom, in his whimsical way, he had formed a great affection, could now come to the end of his days in peace. He thought of the bell that was wanted down at the church in the camp, and speculated on how much it would cost to have three or four, and he meant the church to have them, because he "owed that much to maw." He could spend a hundred for "Father Cassady's 'Lives of the Blessed Saints.'" And so the day passed through.

At noon, for the first time, he had to go and call Channel from his work, where already the veteran was more than hip-deep in a trench, with clay stains in his beard and dust on his eyebrows. Also, for the first time in their acquaintance,

Channel Smith was too eager to return to his task to prolong the meal. Indeed, when dusk came and the supper was over, Channel was too weary to do more than crawl toward his cabin for rest. Lish pitied him, and made a resolution, confessed to Jack, who was loafing outside within close reach, that they would have to move back to the cabin pretty soon, just to comfort the lonesome old man.

The beauties of the moon failed to attract him, although it had now come to the full with the strong, mellow light of the altitudes on a clear summer's night. On most occasions he liked to sit and stare at it, and dream weird fancies as to what kind of mines must be on an orb so yellow and golden. He decided to go to bed, and stood up, yawning, when he heard a noise below — the sound of a breaking twig.

Quite alert he listened and stepped to the edge of the tent. A voice called to him with a sharp appeal that sounded almost like a sob, and he ran toward its seeming source. From a clump of brush a form rushed toward him, and he stopped in surprise.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed. "Maggie! Is that you?"

"Yes," she panted, hastening toward him, and

he saw that she was almost hysterical from some cause.

"What's the matter?" he called, suppressing a desire to take her in his arms.

"It's that Big Bill and his gang!" she asserted, struggling to control herself. "Mrs. Higgins has been asking for her husband all the evening, and — and I thought I would hurry over here and tell you. You said to let you know and —"

She gave but a part of her reason for the visit; but that he could not know.

"Well?"

"Well, I came up the road, and then I saw some men on horses coming my way, and I was afraid. I ran off and hid behind a big tree by the side, and they came and stopped right in front of where I was. It was Big Bill and his gang. There are six of them. I heard every word they said. They are the men who have been robbing stages over across the Divide. It seems they've always gone over to that side, and then come back to Peaceful Hill, and let people think they had a mine somewhere they worked; but it wasn't that. They are the thieves."

"Yes, yes!" Lish exclaimed, trying to learn the immediate cause of her fright. "But what else did you hear?"

"That's just it," she panted. "They've heard somehow, that the clean-ups of both the Cricket and Canada Hill Mines have been held because there had been so many robberies, and that to-night the gold from both mines, all they've cleaned up for the past three months, is to be sent out with two expressmen who will go with a mountain wagon by the long way around, and land it at the railway over the other side."

"Humph! What then?"

"Why, don't you see? They're going to rob the wagon! They will stop it over near the Big Horn Cañon, and it's right close to here. And they don't know it, but I remember that Murdock sent a wagon away this afternoon."

The prospector laughed with high good humor. She stopped him with an exclamation.

"But that isn't all! I know from what I heard Murdock say that the wagon went to the Canada Hill first for the gold, and that then they were going to the Cricket, and that at almost any time now that wagon will be going along over the other road — the one on the other side of you. Bill and his men will get tired of waiting on the road between here and the Canada Hill, and ride across, and maybe kill those men. Oh, Lish! Lish! What shall we do to stop it?"

"Why, don't you see? They're going to rob the wagon!"

His face had settled into a frown as he saw the urgency for action.

"Why didn't you go back to the Canada Hill and tell Murdock?" he asked.

"I was afraid! They got on the road between me and the mine. I had to come this way. I couldn't go back. I was afraid to strike off onto the hills, because the woods are dark, and they might hear me, and —"

"Well, how long did you hide there?" he demanded.

"Almost an hour."

"And they were still there?"

"Yes."

He turned toward his tent with a rapidity that suggested decision.

"Maggie," he said briskly, "you go on down the gulch and wake Channel, and tell him what you've told me. Then get him to take you over the hills and down to the Canada Hill, and tell Murdock to get his men out as quick as the Lord'll let him, and come over toward the Big Horn. There's a short cut across the tops of the hills up there that I'll take, and I'll head off the expressmen and tell 'em to turn back. I'll wait till I see 'em, and maybe by that time Murdock and his crowd will be over, and we'll put an end to this

thievin' that's been goin' on here in this country. Now, don't be afraid; but just go! And get a hustle on you, Maggie, because there ain't a whole lot of time to be thrown on the waste dump!"

Frightened as she was, she obeyed him, and ran down the trail, while he went ahead with his preparations. He threw on his coat, emptied the box of cartridges into the pockets, slipped the gun into his belt, and, without looking back, plunged across the gulch and up the hillside.

"Lucky thing I made a trip over to that road one day," he muttered to himself, as he gained the top of the first hill, and looked around him. Although the moonlight changed the appearance of the landmarks, he soon found his direction, and hastened onward. At the top of the second and last hill the sweat was running in steaming rivulets over his face, and he was almost breathless from his exertions. "Now she'll be downhill," he grunted, with satisfaction. "Whew! But that was some climbin'! Wonder how long it took me? I'll have to get a jump on me to reach that road and watch for the expressmen. 'Twon't do for Big Bill's gang to see 'em first!"

He was rapidly developing a plan in his head, that consisted of striking the road, looking to see if there were any fresh tracks on it, then turning

back toward Peaceful Hill, as fast as he could go with caution, and thus intercepting the gold wagon in case he was not too late. The one feature that worried him was whether or not Big Bill had not grown tired of waiting on the Canada Hill road, and already moved around in the other direction and planted his band in readiness for the ambuscade. He wondered how they could have got the information, and then allowed himself to dwell on the suspicion that some millman in one of the mines must have been dishonest, and got word to them for a possible share in the loot.

"Lordy!" he exclaimed to himself in that same whispering mumble, "I wish I had two or three good men with me. I don't like this lay-out at all, at all! It looks right bad!"

He stumbled now and then as he plunged down the mountainside, and began to go more cautiously. It would not do to warn anyone of his approach, if there were those lying in wait, and that was a chance which might be possible. He wished that he had moccasins instead of the heavy mountain shoes, for then he could, with his wood lore, have traveled noiselessly. From the high brow of a hill, where the trees had come to an end against a barren space, he looked down, and, far below, saw the pale thread of the road as it wound along

in its course toward the crest of the Divide. It was bare and white, and nowhere was there a moving object.

His hope mounted higher. He would be in time. He went forward, however, with the same caution, for there was no telling what might be concealed behind those gray rocks, grouped in grotesque, rugged shapes below, and bordering the trail. He stopped to listen now and then, but all was as still as it could be only in the high, calm hills. Once he thought he heard the sound of a horse's shoe clinking against stone, and for a full minute repressed his breathing and strained his auditory nerves for a repetition of the sound. It rendered him fearful lest he be too late, and more cautious. He stooped down and pulled off his shoes, tied their laces together, and fastened them to his belt behind. Now he went catlike, slipping swiftly from bowlder to bowlder, and hoping all the time that it was a useless precaution.

"Humph! Ain't this tough luck!" he exclaimed softly, as he came out to another point and found himself looking down a sheer drop of a hundred feet. "Nice place for a dark night! I got on the wrong lead, somehow. Wisht I knew this hill better. Guess I'll have to go around."

Still annoyed by this misfortune, he made his way slowly and with considerable effort back along the hillside, and was compelled now and then to climb, hand over hand, over some miniature cliff, or rampart, that had resisted erosion. He entered a belt of timber where the shadows were lacework at his feet, or so dark, and heavy, and threatening that he traversed a dim way of terror. He was eager for contact with the road, where the dust might tell its story, and yet went ever more quietly as he approached it.

He emerged from the trees and found himself on a rugged, bowlder-heaped slope, and gave a sigh of satisfaction as he saw at the foot the same pale ribbon where wound the highway. Ordinarily its poetry would have appealed to him, with its history of argonauts, adventures, and rattling stages bearing men to and from the land of promise; but now he was too absorbed in his mission.

He paused, crouching behind a bowlder, and looked down toward it to see if it was clear. Off down its slow declivity lay Peaceful Hill. Still beyond that would be the fork turning over toward the Canada Hill Mine. But a little way farther would be the cut-off to the head of the cañon to which it clung as if in desperation.

Away up back of him, after a sharp climb, would be the cut of the Big Horn, where Big Bill and his ruffians proposed to make a stand.

"It's sure," he thought rapidly, "that they wouldn't do it anywhere else, because their chance for a get-away is better there. It's safe for me to slip down to that road and see what it has to tell."

He was already starting downward and was threading his way around the gray stones, when he heard a sound that keyed him to the highest tension, and instantly he threw himself flat on the ground, crept to a bowlder, and peered around it.

Not more than fifty feet from him he saw a dark shape hastening to the shadow of a pinnacle of rock. Even as he looked he saw another shape running in the same direction, and at the same instant heard a man's voice calling to another to "Hurry up and get behind cover!"

If these were the bandits, and they could be no other, he thought, they were between him and the way he must go. He lifted his head higher and looked up the road, wondering if it were possible that they had all arrived too late, and that the messengers were already past and in safety. He wished that the bare spot above him afforded protecting shadows that would enable

him to escape and examine that road. He did not stop to consider that Big Bill's informant, whoever he was, must have made fairly certain of the time of starting, and that, in any event, the robbers, being mountain men like himself, must have examined the trail and made certain that their prey eluded them.

He was worried, and for once mistrusted his own judgment. He thought over the possibilities of support, how long it would take Maggie and the weary old miner to get word of the peril to Murdock, and of how soon they would be able to start. The whole affair looked desperate. The only hope he could reasonably sustain was that the special messengers had been delayed in their start, whatever hour it might have been scheduled, and thus be so far down toward the camp that the men from the Canada Hill would get there ahead of them.

In the tensity of the situation the time dragged. It seemed to him that he had been lying there an hour behind the bowlder. He began to wonder if no one would ever come, and to strain his eyes in the effort to discover some of those others in ambuscade. He was angry at them because they had changed their plan and made this, instead of the Big Horn, the scene of the hold-up. He did

not stop to reason that, perhaps, they had decided, at the last moment, that this would prove a safer ground, with its possibility for escape across the cañon, and off toward the railway on the other side, before pursuit could become keen and menacing. Nor did he think that, perhaps, they had come to the conclusion that this was to be their last *coup* around that part of California, and that they had best scatter, and seek other and less-disturbed fields. It was all a muddle, with nothing to do but wait and hope for assistance.

"Great Jimminy!" he thought and whispered to himself. "Lish Henley, you're forever a-buttin' into trouble, no matter where you be! What did you ever come here for, anyhow? Ain't you got enough to do without actin' as a sheriff? You certainly are four hundred kinds of jackass, out here all alone in the night, with six men ready to gun for you the minute they know you're here! Why under the sun don't them slow dubs from the Canady get here to help you out of this mess!"

Suddenly he shut his jaws hard, and lifted his head, and listened. There was the clear, unmistakable sound of hoofs and wheels coming up the road from the direction of Peaceful Hill. He raised himself to his knees and pulled his hat

farther over his eyes, with an automatic, useless motion, as if striving to shut off sunlight.

"Too late!" he whispered. "It's a cinch that's the express fellers, drivin' right into this wild cat's nest, and what in the name of the great horn spoon can I do to warn 'em!"

From where he had stationed himself he could not see very far down the road, and it was difficult in that still night to estimate the distance between the watchers and the oncoming team. He hesitated for an instant, and then, bravely reckless, lifted his pistol and fired into the air.

Of a sudden the night became hideous with sound. He had tried to give an alarm in the hope that the drivers would turn back and lash their horses to safety, without regard for his own chances of escape; but he had not thought that, perhaps, Big Bill's gang might take the shot as being the accidental discharge of a gun by one of their own men, and instantly force the issue. And the latter was the case. Into the patch of open road came the mountain wagon, with the driver frantically tugging at the startled horses, and an express messenger on his feet with a sawed-off shotgun clutched in his hands.

Before the echoes of the prospector's shot had begun there was a second report from the side of

the trail, and the messenger doubled over, the gun flew from his hands, and he pitched forward and fell limply across the dashboard. The driver still pulled at his reins. A second shot lashed the night, and a horse screamed with pain and dropped to the road, while its mate struggled frantically to extricate itself from the entanglement.

The driver jumped to his feet and lifted his hands. Men appeared to leap out of shadows, where before had been nothing, and charge downward, shouting vague threats, and screaming oaths. One of them plunged toward the frightened horse, and his hand was already stretching to seize the bits, when there came a sharp explosion from the bowlder over which the prospector, the man of peace, leaned steadily. The man at the horse's head sagged slowly to the road, and there was confusion.

The robbers who had caught sight of that tragedy whirled toward the sound of the shot, while others reached for the driver to drag him to the ground.

Again there was that heavy explosion, and the largest man of all, the leader of the gang, threw up his hands, twisted on his heels, and pitched forward almost over the fallen horse. As swift as sound itself, another shot followed, and the man

who was struggling toward the driver abandoned his design, lowered his arms, clasped the tire of a wheel, and hung there for support, cursing loudly. There were shouts, screams, orders, and oaths.

The driver stooped over and lifted his fellow messenger, and the three remaining bandits swung toward the prospector, who had leaped out into the open and was coming toward them. He fired his last shot, and it proved ineffectual. He dropped to his knees and ejected his shells, and yet, with steady hands, reloaded the gun, while bullets were spattering on the rocks around him. If he lacked anything of valor, it did not show in that two or three minutes when he was the heart of a battle on the mountainside, for he was as calm and unperturbed, now that he was in action, as if nowhere in the world was there a menace to him.

"Lordy!" he exclaimed petulantly. "I never did like that ejector!"

He was working with mad haste now, and paying no attention to his enemies, who continued to fire. He arose to his feet, and again his pistol threw a flash of yellow light, and again his aim had been true; but even in that instant of triumph, and while his foot was raised to rush forward, there came another report from the guns aimed at

him, he felt his fingers relax, and strove to tighten them, a sharp, stinging pain through his side, and the whole world reeled there in the moonlight, swung for an instant, with the moon leering and twisting in its arc, and he pitched forward to the smooth stones, twitched for an instant, and then lay still. All shouts were rendered dumb to his ears. All the light had faded. The intoxication was gone. The battle was at an end for him, as he lay there, prone on the field he had so valiantly defended.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE FIGHT

IT was a long time before he opened his eyes, and then, as he tried to sit up, there was a stabbing pain through his lung, and his nostrils were assailed with the unmistakable odor of antiseptics. He looked around him. The dawn had come again, and over him leaned the camp doctor, with his shirt sleeves rolled up, and a questioning look in his eyes. He turned his head, trying to recollect all that had happened, and wondering what had brought him to this pass. A woman's sobs were behind him, and he rolled his eyes in that direction to see Maggie, the red-headed waitress. Back of her stood Murdock, gravely watching him, and down by the side of the extemporized operating table knelt Channel Smith, his trembling hands trying to smooth out a sheet, and his old eyes filled with tears. A door was jerked violently open, and he saw his partner, Harry Martin, tiptoeing to the bedside.

"What's all the fuss about?" the prospector asked faintly. "I don't believe in gettin' fussed up over things. I'm a man of peace, I am. Quarrelin' ain't no good," and then his voice trailed faintly away into an incoherent mumble.

It was fine to sleep so gently. It was like floating away on a great soft cloud, to find sleep come so easily, and with such a boonful rest. Moreover, it was strange how time went when one had such sleep; for when he again opened his eyes, it was evening, and the room was quite still. He twisted again with that pain, but his mind cleared as if from a shock. Someone came toward him, someone with softly rustling garments. He looked up at her; but had no desire to lift himself.

"Hello, Maggie," he said. "Is that you?"

"Yes," she answered. "But the doctor said you were to keep quiet."

"That's the easiest thing I ever done in all my life," he replied. "I've always been a lazy sort of cuss. Where was we all at?"

"Don't you remember the fight? We got there just as it was finished."

"Umhuh! Reckon someone got me, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"Am I bad hit?"

She could not answer for a moment, and went around out of his weak range of vision, with a handkerchief held to her eyes.

"Pshaw! Don't you go to feelin' bad, girl," he said feebly. "Tell me all about what happened. They ain't nothin' to make a fuss over."

"They told me not to talk to you," she exclaimed, "but I just can't help it! Big Bill is dead, and two others. The express messenger is alive. He's up in the mess-house, and the doctor thinks he'll live. The other one wasn't hurt. The boys caught the others of Bill's gang, and have taken them down to the county seat to put them in jail. The doctor says you'll live, and John Martin is on his way up here. He says he's going to give you half of his claim, too, when you get well, just because you saved his dirty old gold. But they said you had to be kept quiet."

He rested still for quite a while, and looked at the ceiling, where a big moth was fluttering around in aimless circles.

"Maggie," he said, "I wisht you'd catch him, easylike, so's not to hurt his wings, and put him outside. Poor little thing! He don't know where to go, and it's such a nice big world outside!"

He watched her supple form and lithe motion, as she captured the bewildering thing, and, in the hollow of her hands, carried it to freedom.

"How's Marthy?" he asked.

"She'll get well. And she wants her man."

He lifted one hand and reached out as if feeling for something. She knew what he sought and put her own hand in his, where he clasped it, and seemed content.

"Maggie," he said, in the same weak voice, "they're goin' to have a lot of peace down in the camp, now that Big Bill's cleaned out. It'll be a fine place for folks to live, and get old together, with their burros. I ain't much; but I do wish you'd marry me when I get out of this-here bed. Can't you see some way to do it?" he concluded wistfully. "I sure want you right bad! I love you, Maggie, a heap more'n I can tell you about."

She stooped over and kissed him, and sat beside him until again, weak, and tired of fighting and wounds, he went to sleep.

Nothing seemed to trouble him from that hour until his recovery. Life was all simple and without complexities. The last question which disturbed him, and that was of little moment, was when, some weeks later, he prepared to lead her before the little parson, in the queer little church,

in the peaceful camp which he had entered as a Mediator by force. And then, at the last moment, he looked perplexed, and stared into her eyes, and said:

"Say, Maggie! What in blazes is your last name? It just sort of comes to me that I ain't never heard it yet, and a man orter know them things, hadn't he? I guess I told you mine!"

THE END

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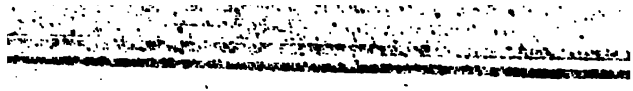

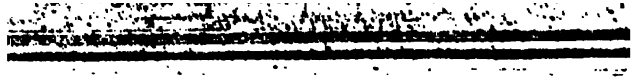

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